

MYSTICISM

- create your own world -

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1. Preface

From time immemorial there are people who try to attune to their deepest inner self. They pursue this, in the understanding that they consist of more than the material body and the mind. Inside them lies as it were a more authentic 'I', that they miss and with whom they hope to restore the contact long since lost. In their attunement they not only try to make contact with their own self, but also with that which goes beyond it. To undertake this, is the essence of mysticism, or the walking of the Path. Whoever walks this Path is called a mystic. He carries out his quest alone or together with others who likewise strive after the restoration of the bond with their inner self. When the cooperating with others gets a regular structure in which knowledge is passed on, we can speak of an esoteric school or an initiation school.

Antiquity knew many of these schools, for instance in Egypt and Greece, where the pupil was instructed in the knowledge concerning the constitutions of the inner self. Even in our time there are schools that accomplish the same. Whether one is a member of an esoteric school or tries to solve the mystical secrets without guidance, the way is not easy. The traveller in the spiritual realms awaits many a pitfall. Only few guide him. He must do everything himself. Sometimes he is assisted by fellow travellers.

He who is spiritually united with others and walks the mystical path, acquires strength, uses it and can subsequently pass it on. There are many sorts of mystics and many mystical paths. Every pupil chooses the path that fits him best. He must feel at home - even in the trials that he goes through -, know himself to be on his own territory. He is like a nucleus and in the circle surrounding him his life is enacted. When we meet, those circles touch. Sometimes they overlap in such a manner that their nuclei almost touch. Then the impediments that keep us divided vanish. Do not we all have to deal with exertions, difficulties and afflictions? Life however is not only a struggle. There is also serenity and reward. The one moment we are down and the other we are on the mountain top. That is what we recognize one another by, by the endeavour to escape human shortcomings and enter the world of beauty, that is always present and waits for discovery. The working together on that purpose, the intention to achieve something positive, forms our sphere of influence.

Mystical life is not isolated from ordinary existence. It is one pole of reality. The mystic does not live in a hovel on the mountain. He or she lives in the middle of society. And rightly so, for much that the pupil has to deal with in everyday life has interfaces with mystical activity. The subjects that we will have a look at hereafter, play a part in the development of everybody who organizes his life in a mystical manner. The pupil polishes a number of facets of the jewel of the inner self, which becomes more radiant because of this. Beauty however has many faces. What we call beautiful, mirrors our personality. If what we are confronted with means beauty to us, let us act accordingly. When we are in peace, then thinking, feeling and acting are in harmony with the desires of the higher self. Self-confidence and steadiness of character are the remaining companions on our long but wonderful track.

Alchemy

So this art must ever secret be,

the cause whereof is this as ye may see;
if one evil man had thereof all his will,
all Christian peace he might easily spill;
and with his pride he might pull down
rightful kings and princes of renown.
Wherefore the sentence of peril and jeopardy
upon the teacher resteth dreadfully.

(Norton, Ordinal of Alchemy)

Our work is defended through its very nature.

2. Mysticism, a lifelong study

Studying in the esoteric school

Just like man cannot breath without lungs, a breath that he cannot do without; just like man can digest no food without organs, food that he needs; just like the world without cordial people cannot develop love, love which is needed; thus the mystical student cannot do without schooling, for it is through schooling alone that an earthly being can learn how to attune to what is true, good and beautiful. This tuition is taken care of by the esoteric schools, which for centuries apply themselves to showing their students that, next to the external life, an inner world exists. Just like an external school that has a fixed program and slowly prepares its students for the application of what they have learned, the mysteryschool, the esoteric school, acts in the same manner.

There is no other study, no other path of development, where after tens of years the students are still studying their course. There is no other educational path where periodically one thinks one is prepared for one's final exams, and yet fails to get one's diploma. There is no other field of investigation where one is so crushed between the urges of the world, the urges of one's own mind, of one's ego and spiritual self, each fighting for supremacy, and where the student must try to follow all these conflicting voices, and then balance them. Mysticism is an outspoken fight for the survival of the fittest.

The distinction between the several schools of initiation is based on their difference of vibration, of technique, and of aim. When we feel fine with one or other esoteric school it means that we are in harmony with it. When undergoing the school's initiations and following its teachings we are, as it were, starting from the outward end of the spoke of a great wheel. You may find seekers at the other end of the wheel who follow other kinds of teachings, and yet we might in the end find each other in the centre of the wheel. One of the differences between the schools is their way of tutoring. A universal school will be focussed on leading the student to finding inner harmony, then on developing harmony between the student and his environment, and finally on the harmony between the student en his inner self and the higher spheres. The methods are meditation, contemplation and concentration, coming together in the tuition and the initiations. All this is done within the privacy of the study at home, or with other students, in affiliated bodies of the fraternity.

Most esoteric schools emphasize that all knowledge gained should be used for the benefit of mankind and the preservation of human civilization. Every student, knowing this, can make his own plan of development. On the basis of the teachings he may develop his own kind of meditation technique, his own way of working on harmony, his own plans on how to use his knowledge for the benefit of mankind, and his own way of getting the things that he has learned across to others.

The question arises whether it is useful to tell others about our walking the mystical path. The measure may be whether we feel to be in harmony when divulging our mystical affiliations. Suppose we have some special thing in life, of high quality, that we have put our whole interest in, that we are devoted to with love, and that means a lot to us: to whom would we divulge it? No doubt only to a person whom we expect to have a sound judgment, who is willing to lend us

an open ear and who does not treat our pearls badly. This need not always be a person who agrees with us as regards the contents of what we share with him, but we must have a trustworthy one before us. Otherwise it would do nobody any good that we say anything about it.

What does this path offer us and how long does it take before we notice anything of it?

Whether we look at the arts, the sciences, mysticism or sports: if before applying our skills we would wait until we had accomplished everything that can be achieved, we would never come to anything. On first thoughts it seems that first we must master each and every aspect of the skill that we want to master, before applying it. But every small step already brings us some mastery. When we apply it instantly, we get new experiences each time, which add to our knowledge and make the coming steps in our study more and more efficient. When instead of following mystical teachings we would have decided to take piano lessons, we would have found that the same struggles that one finds with the esoteric school are found in taking piano lessons. When our piano lessons begin with the simplest experiments and exercises, we cannot image that maybe one day we will play the way we see the great pianists do in a concert hall. We are not discouraged by their mastery. Those examples incite us to go on, as we know that the master pianists have begun in the same manner as we have. But is this a reason to endlessly play the initial and most simple tunes? No, we go on, day after day, week after week, but then our development begins to make little jumps.

The simplest exercises are followed by more complex ones. Some we master eventually, some we do not. And thus we continue, year after year. Although we may not end up as a master player in the concert hall, maybe we will after all ... if we want to and are talented. But it may also be that we let go of the wish to play for the large audience. We may find playing for family and friends much more rewarding. As for the mystical exercises: when we play the simplest piano tunes to become a master player, our goal is not, to reach the stage where we will masterly play those simplest tunes. Long before we have become a master we will have abandoned those tunes, and be involved in exercises of the most complex kind. When performing mystical experiments, we can drop those that we do not succeed with. We take another one. And another. And yet another one. We will progress, no matter what. It is a dialectic process. Mysticism is like a study where we regularly receive an invitation for an exam that is cancelled at the last minute. Then we prepare for the next exam, get a new invitation and again the exam is cancelled. When this would happen in another field of study than that of mysticism, we would certainly not be able to bear the enormous pressure that the cancellations bring with them. But in mysticism we strangely enough are capable of handling this. It has an alchemical result. It is as if we are bent to and fro, like metal, and then break. This brings about the transmutation from the one into the other state of being.

Is there an end to a mystical study?

The mystical work takes a whole life. Although we shall be lengthily busy educating ourselves and applying in the meantime the things learned, we do not reach a point where the study is done. Our lives encompass successive phases, that encompass innumerable events. A big part of our life is occupied by studying the contents of those events and applying and mastering them.

He who begins with his mystical study is soon surprised by the enormous vastness of the spheres that he has set foot in. At set intervals there will be breakthroughs in his personality, which will convince him of the grandeur and permanence of the mystical work.

How by the way should we recognize those realms? Somebody who is unaware of the beauty of nature might walk right along flowers and trees without noticing them. But when somebody would initiate him in the wealth of all there is to see, then the unaware person would open his eyes for the beauty that he has so long neglected and ignored. Not even ignored, for that would mean a basic awareness. It would mean a real waking up, where the strange phenomena of nature would become manifest for the very first time in his mind. This breakthrough would mean opening a second world to that person, a world that he never before even could have imagined it existed. Constantly thereafter he would be drawn back to that strange, secrete, second world, whilst living among many other persons who would not know that this world existed.

The striving after a mystical ideal is like walking on steps. Slowly growing we arrive at the point where we realize that our life experiences and ideals lead to a gigantic cathedral, a cathedral in which in every chapel a new truth can be found. With an ideal we try to achieve a purpose in a short or long period of time, but it is valid no matter the result. Ideals arouse in us a tension that lifts us up. With it an unending study is no longer a burden, but a carrier of the ideal. We strongly await progress. In every phase we shall strongly long for the next one. And in that phase there is the strong yearning to come in a next one. Until we recognize that all those phases are like steps. They lead to a tremendous realm of nature that is without boundaries and therefore never can be explored to the full. Every part of the study is like an instrument that ushers us into the greatest of all temples: the temple of Nature. We want to devote ourselves wholly to it, provided that we know that our fight will be over one day. This is why we can hardly digest that our struggle, our quest, is without an end.

How would it come that we long to progress and that we want to see an end to our mystical study? Why do we want to be able to say at one point in time that we have completed that study, and that there is nothing left to learn? Perhaps because we hear our inner voice ever talking about the beautiful realm that we had to leave when our present life began. Only when we have seen that realm again will we be satisfied, will we deem our study completed. Would there be not a single desire with us for that beautiful sphere, would not a single spark of it remain or a remembrance? By trying to equal or reflect on earth the world from above, we bring harmony between both worlds and feel happy. That is why we want to perpetuate this happiness. It must be the concluding piece of our study. After it nothing may come anymore. This may be the explanation why we hope that our study will be ended one day. The idea that the tuition of life brings us to a final destination, consequently has taken root with many a beginning pupil. This idea is both true and incomplete. Life's daily experiences form a key to achieving great things, and in that they are complete. But the field of study is unlimited. There will not come a moment that it is completed, that everything has been achieved and discovered. Therefore there is only a broad outline of the way in which the student is prepared.

Mysticism is recognition

For centuries already, mankind is instructed in the truths of the two worlds. And for centuries during our lives in the dust, the knowledge of that other splendid world lies dormant. Countless fairy tales tell us about it. The fairy characters, like the princess in the castle tower who is guarded by a dragon; the knight who leaves no opportunity unutilized, breaking the powers of darkness and - armed with the sword of his love - freeing his beloved; the fairy; the legendary three wishes; all of them refer to that second world. This indirect knowledge is passed on from century to century, in many ways which have become part of the items of cultural significance of every nation. Therefore we are already familiar with much of what we learn in life. No truth is so surprising but it finds recognition somewhere inside us. Everything that we bring to light of ourselves by means of outward methods is present already in our deepest self, and by being made aware of what is already present in our inner self, we automatically relive what we already knew. It is as if we smell the perfume of a flower, and then suddenly see images come up in us of our earliest youth, when we became cognizant of that fragrance. An unexpected fragrance or colour can evoke images of which we did not expect that they were stored in our deeper consciousness.

The role of the laws of nature

To have a correct picture of the schooling that the inner self needs, it must be clear through which patterns the development of this inward self is directed. Such regularities are called 'laws of nature' or 'cosmic laws'. These terms are not completely equal. When there are laws in the universe, they are of necessity cosmic, for they are present in the cosmos. But although both terms are often used indiscriminately, in mysticism the term 'cosmic law' is used in a narrower way. With it a part of the laws of nature is meant. For instance, among the common 'laws of nature' we range the electricity laws as formulated by the physicists. But when mystics talk about 'cosmic' laws, they think of the law of karma, the law of reincarnation, or the law of compensation, because these are of great importance to their mental functioning. The distinction between these and the 'normal' laws of nature is subtle, because we are also governed by the laws of electricity and other laws of all kinds. Knowledge of the other laws is therefore equally important. The real distinction is, that the term 'cosmic laws' is often reserved for that part of nature that deals with inner functioning, mysticism, and inner development.

There is no such thing as an index on laws of nature or cosmic laws. 'Normal' science and mystical science have only yet begun to understand a tiny part of what it all means. Many discoveries will be made yet. Today it is even so, that when somebody comes with a new theory regarding the universe or reality, it may mean that our understanding of the already formulated laws of nature is no longer valid. We then may have to devise a whole new concept of what a certain law really means. When we observe some new regularity in the universe, we may put it down in a new description, i.e. a law. But even when we would have a complete index it would take years to even comprehend how one isolated law works.

Some laws we know intuitively. If we are gentle-hearted we will not contemplate hurting somebody. We do not know why this is so. It may be built up in the past, or maybe it is innate in our nature, and even then it is still no explanation. There are a lot of different personalities in the universe, each on their respective band width of frequencies. Some are inherently good, some bad. A law that one person has learned to master may be of no interest to someone else. Not

because this law is past the latter person, but it may be that he does not want to listen to his inner voice when it tries to tell him that a law should be taken into consideration. Science distinguishes many laws of nature. They can all be described separately, but although such descriptions chart a special phenomenon of nature this does not mean that nature itself is fragmented. A law of nature formulated by man merely acknowledges the uniformity, the regularity of one phenomenon, but not one single symbol can reflect or represent the universe entirely. We create a formula to indicate that we are conscious of the presence of a law; a law as realized by our mind. After all the law has been formulated on the basis of phenomena that we notice and interpret, not the other way around. It is not so that nature behaves according to the way how we describe it. That which man calls a law of nature is nothing more than that he thinks that nature works in a certain way.

What are we doing it all for?

There must be something that pushes us in the direction of the mystical path: the magnetism that stems from a situation of incompleteness. Intellectually it will not always be very clear what it is that we are wanting (in both meanings of the word), but we will have tried to give it a name for ourselves to the best of our ability. This initially emotional or intellectual reason may be so obvious or self-evident, that we may think that it is the genuine reason for our being attracted to the mystical path. During our studies we may for a while continue our path with this reason in the back of our mind, but after some time we change inwardly. This shapes us into a new person in some way. A better attuning takes place, and this in return changes our initial purpose; the purpose that we had in mind when we took our first step. So our present reason to be on the path may differ a lot from the reason with which we began. Deep inside there remains a constant factor, for even if our aims change, the deeper reason why we want to develop our inner self does not change. In essence we do no different than trying to recover our happiness, and this happiness lies in our inner self. As we saw there is a means that helps making the mystical work successful and that is a personal ideal. Not a randomly chosen, artificial ideal, but one that is the reflection of the true human being that we are, and that flourishes from our soul. Do not we all have such an ideal? Perhaps we have never tried to vocalize it so precisely.

Are there things in this life that are of main importance to us? For our happiness or for the idea that it is worth while to reside here? If the ideal answers the deep calling of our heart, then it will also be related to our heart and be of great beauty. The ideal will be good, bringing happiness and inspiration. For if anything will inspire us, it will be our ideal. Do we know something or somebody who inspires us? Or are we still seeking? Or have we lost the ideal? If we know ourself and also know our heart, we shall doubtlessly discover it. But the ideal does not lead to a final stage, to the standing still of our upwardly aimed movement. The mystic way of life is unlimited; there is no limit to the study.

What causes somebody to be attracted to the mystical way? It is not a convenient path. One reason for this attraction may be, that in mysticism he seeks ideals. For that he does not mind edging his way through the barriers. Mystical schooling is the gate and for some the labyrinth leading to psychic awakening. This way is passable, but surely is accompanied by trials. These develop as soon as somebody has the braveness to seek inner knowledge. This striving will automatically evoke forces that threaten to prevent the seeker from entering. But the inner self is

strong, it can make a stand against every obscure power. There can be no darkness where there is light. The personal ideal is an inspiring force in our lives. Our outward world is the hermetic door that can give entrance to the inner world. The notion of this keeps a mystical student going.

3. Mystic

Reflect, ye guardian of the solid stone
Your temple's not supported by cement
And if your friezes countless seasons stand
And thousands tread your work for fun alone

It's solid as the atoms in a bone
Death rather carries man onto his end
Than that the muses who with trembling hand
Buttress the walls, collapse with plaintive moan

The undersoil with all your strength defend
But do not mind the blinded antipods
The structure's rooted spurs are holding on

Make of your fight a lasting document
Serve not the ones who beat you, but the gods
Build fiercely on and be afraid of none

4. Changing inwardly

That mysticism can change a person may be difficult to understand for somebody who has not experienced it personally. An outsider assumes that the change takes place in the realm of thought, in opinions, in behaviour, which is true indeed. More happens however. A psychical transmutation takes place. The lower elements of the character are converted into elements of a higher order. This cannot just be told from someone's face. The change becomes only visible for someone who knows what he has to look for.

It is good that the seeker has to walk his way without constant assistance. What he encounters and discovers along this path during the journey, will thus take root all the better. It is of no use to him if he is shown a truth that he cannot check himself. Every stage is concluded with results that help us to set foot on the section of the road that lies ahead of us. A change takes place that we can no longer explain to the outside world. It involves not just a part of our being, like the mind, the feeling or the understanding, but the whole person. It is as if we were strangers to ourselves all those years. Just as if we get to know ourselves for the first time, now that the development dawns that we call mystical maturing, the unfolding of the rose, the conquering of the dragon.

We have access to nature of which we are an inseparable part; nature often shows which grand treasures it contains. But many a person is surprised when he hears that knowledge of nature can make him a different person. Not many people are very enthusiastic with the idea. We feel hesitant about wakening up some morning and noticing that we have become another person. We are afraid that we lose our personality. This fear may spring from insufficient understanding of what the essence of a person really is. He who follows the mystical path changes radically, so that it seems that he becomes a different person. But also he who leads a normal, nonmystical life, changes daily. Under the influence of his environment and of personal experiences nobody remains the same day after day. This is generally recognized, and accepted without problems. Within mysticism the regular course of life is studied meticulously and adjusted in a subtle way. First and foremost the physical being is studied, so that we learn to know it better. By degrees we discover that there is an inner personality as well. This discovery is just as drastic as when we would have become another person. When we realize this we shall welcome the changes in ourselves.

Man is inclined to turn down attractive offerings when he does not realize that they can be of value to him. The mystical gold offered by the mystics is often neglected. As a gift it is too good to be true. Yet the mystics show society daily how it can change. But the people are afraid to part with the familiar and to set foot on a path that leads to an unknown target. When somebody gives us the choice to continue living in the old fashion or walk a way that makes us a different person, we probably prefer to remain who we are, for then we know at least what we have. Strangely enough we are afraid of alienating from ourselves, whereas this has already happened, since the improper self mistakes itself for the higher self.

A different fear would be much more understandable, namely that through the change from the nonmystical to the mystical life we get into a vacuum. How do we get through the period of darkness, when after the casting off of our old shape we cannot at once take on another form? Temporarily we are in a no man's land, but if we do not cross it we shall not undergo a real change. The urge that spurs us on in our quest protects us in the no man's land, of which further on our expedition we shall yet cross many a colony. The journey is heavy because the inner

growth goes so slowly that it is not conspicuous, whereas the periods of darkness and standstill attract attention. That makes it difficult to have faith in the good outcome of the undeniably risky undertaking that we have begun. By looking back every so much time it becomes visible what has changed for the better. The progress that we can hold ourselves accountable for, is an incitement to keep going.

Somebody who does not want to grow and does not want to put up a struggle seems to lead a quiet life, much quieter than that of the mystic. But the calm that is not allowed us and that we long for so often, looks worryingly much like inertia and this is not what the mystical student is waiting for. It is definitely the case that he has to wage a fight. Indeed he sacrifices the relaxation of not struggling. Struggle is the toll that he pays.

If we want to know the higher self, we must distance ourselves more from the outside world. At first sight this is a loss. For between distancing ourselves from the outside world and entering the inner spheres lies the no man's land. On the mystical path distancing ourselves will be required many times, but for it we get something valuable in return. Confidence and perseverance is the luggage that must be taken along. It requires courage to walk the heaviest path that man knows. On both sides of the road the deep ravines lure us into the protective darkness where we can rest. Their invitation sounds enticing. Yet it is more enticing to simply go on, with the prospect of a true inner dawn.

5. The esoteric schools

Mystics have always had to struggle to keep their balance between the outside world and the inner world. A good observer could always perceive the deep ravine that kept these two worlds separated. On the marginal area of them the mystic just had to see how to keep his footing. He had to conceal himself in the masses. This seems so simple, but how do you hold out? After all it is no sinecure to maintain yourself in the uproar of the third century A.D., or in the times of the Renaissance, or during the sixth Egyptian dynasty, or in the Aztec dominion. There was one principle that made it succeed and kept the mystics together: an ideal. The thought that there must be an ideal, a good intention for every human action, became the basis that eventually would lead to the coming into being of the Great White Brotherhood. Nothing can bring the search of the mystics for themselves to a halt. The search is inherent in their being, part of their nature, part of their task.

When we make our way to the gates of the esoteric school we shall entertain expectations. Otherwise we need not come to an esoteric school and normal life will be enough for us. The expectations that have sent us on our way will change. The student of the inner sciences must part with everything he learned. He no longer lives the life of everybody. He is at odds with life. The average human being lives according to what the outer world dictates him to do. The mystic listens to a voice that comes from within.

Meanwhile the ancient man in the outside world made use of his possibilities. He created philosophies but also the science of philosophy. He carried on trade and developed the economy. He made chemical compounds and brought forth chemical science. He studied the plant world and the animal world and instituted biology. He wrote novels and poems and besides also called linguistics into being. In the mean time the mystics were long since occupied with their own education. They were involved with the sciences of the outside world, but also attuned to the higher self. That goes with the ideal of the Great White Brotherhood. Thus several esoteric schools came into being. From the mystical school inspired sparks of thoughts jumped over to every outer school. Apart from that, most part of the work remained available for the members themselves. They considered it a privilege to belong to their illustrious brotherhood, but sunned themselves especially in the warmth that went out from it.

Esoteric schools enjoy fame for a very long time. The student of the history of the East and the Europe of old, quickly finds out what role they have played. They exerted an attraction on uncounted seekers, who had a desire to understand a bit more of the light they felt burning in themselves and that they wanted to pass on. Thus the esoteric school became an experimental garden, a melting pot, a workplace and a laboratory. The work remained relatively unknown. More unknown than the outer science. It takes many years even for pupils to find out what is hidden in their school. The inner sciences are not widely studied and valued, but hardly any country can be named that has a history that has not been written, at least partly, by the esoteric schools situated within its borders. Between them and the royal houses, the old-established church and the scientists there were continuous connections.

Whether the need for esoteric schools is limited may depend on the development of our planet. We know of no human organization that has lasted for ever, or has been vested from the earliest days of mankind up to now. Organizations are no static event but are vehicles, images of the mind, of human beings, who shape them according to their need and understanding which alter by the decade. When an esoteric school is seen in a broader

perspective, one might come to the conclusion that man will always need some guidance that helps him to develop his inner senses and leads him to attunement to the cosmic. So mysticism may be part of the inner urge of mankind to contact its higher Self. There are many roads that lead to this goal, among which are the esoteric schools.

In private life the mystics go their way almost unnoticed. In the esoteric school we set to work with our study. When we have a need for contact with a hallowed atmosphere we can seclude ourselves. We learn to raise the veils that lie over the consciousness. Not all veils, but surely some of them. In addition to earthly food we also need mental food. If we have almost run out of it, we have to take some again. And then we enter the gates of our school again. Sometimes we fall back into the shadows. Our personality explores its possibilities, and deals with them clumsily through lack of experience. It is a comforting thought that occasionally it happens to everybody. We make mistakes, naturally, but in our esoteric school we can cast off all excess baggage and simply be ourselves. There is always somebody who takes care of us. And in the end there is always the good intention that has led to the Great White Brotherhood.

From the esoteric school we enter society, fed and supported, but after a while we go back. Coming and going, like a child that periodically returns home, there to gain love and strength. For the human being of today the esoteric school still is a wonderful place to settle down. The place where with a careful approach he learns to refine his personality. The instruments for inner development are meditation, contemplation and concentration; and in the outer sphere the study of philosophical principles and mystical laws plays the same part. Not surprising therefore that the esoteric schools form the foundation of civilization for ages. Plotinus, Avicenna, Albertus Magnus, Paracelsus, Francis Bacon, Jacob Boehme, Newton, Leibnitz and many other personalities, have felt at ease within the gates of the esoteric school. Like a mother that gives her children the opportunity to act freely, the school was a harbourage for them. There they could simmer down, attune, fuel up. What bloomed in their mind they gave to the world. They were never afraid to dedicate themselves to the exploration of nature, even if they were frequently kept from it by the prevailing view of their time. Their personality sought a sublime refinement. Through it their science became a science with a conscience. That their achievements are taken notice of even these days, can partly be owed to that.

In the historiography as it is conveyed at school, the least important influences are treated in great length, whereas not a word is breathed about the influence of the esoteric schools. Yet there are countless historians who have given the subject an exhaustive treatment. What the university is for common science, is the esoteric school - the mystical brotherhood - for the science of the mind. At the common universities one can fulfil one's wish to acquire knowledge for the brain. That is what they are for. In order to meet our psychical and mystical needs in addition to this, we need the university of the mind.

There is no unity between the academic world and the world of the esoteric school. Maybe this will change. It is slowly getting through to society that man has a different goal than enriching himself as much as possible within the space of seventy to eighty years, to stuff himself with knowledge and not to trouble himself with the use of this knowledge and with the well-being of his environment and his physical and psychical personality. The developments of the most recent years have confirmed the teachings of the esoteric schools at at least one point: that all world citizens find themselves with others in a profound alliance. As soon as a nation in distress reaches out its hand the world should feel called upon to grasp it, because we are one family.

We, who are familiar with this, find that our hearts no longer remain hidden within the esoteric school. It has served the outside world too long for that. It is just for that reason that the outer world will pay more attention to the esoteric schools. Numerous failures in the sphere of technology and the environment have taught the world that the knowledge of common science is only very one-sided. In the future this development may result in a fraternization between the outside world and the esoteric schools. Many people want to go back to a loving contact with nature. This has always been the first step towards opening the treasure-house that holds the mystical secrets.

The phenomenon of the universal human being belongs to the past, if we consider the contents that this notion has had for centuries. It depicted somebody who had gone deeply into every subject. Despite our restrictions we have the capacity to think creatively, to visualize and to attune to the universe; then we ourselves become universal beings. These human beings can acquire a balanced personality and stand right between the outer school and the esoteric school. Living a mystical life is simple in essence, if we do not look too much for an all-embracing knowledge. We must be ourselves. The veils over the mind do not disappear by bookish knowledge, contemplation or concentration. It takes more and that is being attuned, meditation. We are interested in mysticism for good reason. We did not follow somebody's voice just like that. Day in, day out, we were hemmed in by the voices around us which tried to deceive us with the umpteenth attempting proposal. But one day an image appeared that resounded with the deepest in ourselves, as if it were looking into a mirror. And this image made us guardians of the light.

He who, inspired by an ideal, devotes himself to the advancement of civilization, looks for a way in which this work can take shape. Just as a soul needs a vehicle to express itself, the intentions and impulses need a channel to reveal themselves. This channel is the mystical pupil who is conscious of his assignment. The pupil is trained on the earthly plane in secular situations. The esoteric school trains him in the spiritual field. He fulfils an inner task and on the other hand works normally in society. Attuned to his ideal he looks for ways and means to combine forces.

The task of the pupil is vast and yet not impossible. He only has to guard his intention. It influences the outside world by means of his aura. The process is difficult to control, but the sincere seeker gets help, also from fellow pupils, who form a sacred circle of initiates who personify the highest ideals. This is what they cooperate for. Organizations within which mystics perform their task only have a good effect when the persons who join these organizations give shape to their brotherhood in a cosmic sense. The esoteric school is the outer, material organization that forms a brotherhood by the amalgamation of personalities. Already in the early stages of mankind kindred spirits were drawn to each other. Their cooperation led to the foundation of outer organizations. The divergent characters which joined on the basis of their ideals formed a psychical sphere, the mystical world.

Mysticism educates us in a special manner and if we have changed by it, we better understand that we have a duty. Sometimes it lies within the brotherhoods, to strengthen them, to pass on knowledge and to keep up the fortresses of knowledge for other seekers who need a home base while they long for the light. Not the light that we hold a monopoly on, but that has been entrusted to us, and the possession of which we may foster as long as we disseminate it to our seeking fellow man. The mystic has been ethically educated and has a perception of the future

and of the use of his endeavour. He contemplates the future of mankind and also takes into account the role of the individual. On that point he cherishes both a highly abstract and spiritual vision that in general is not understood by society. The mystic does not always literally voice his higher ideals to the masses. He rather uses his practical work to be understood.

It seems not easy to describe the purpose and method of an esoteric school, but if we try to find the essence it appears to be not so difficult at all. The esoteric school gives careful attention to the development of the inner personality. It tries to do this in such a manner that the harmonic cooperation with the outer personality is not severed but strengthened. When the outer and inner self are in harmony, also in relation to other people, the tuning in to nature gets nearer as a matter of course.

The instruction contains the instruments to attain this. These instruments are recapitulated with the name Tradition. There are unwritten, traditional rules in the human association to which we stick. The traditional rules to which nature sticks are the laws of nature. Besides there is the Tradition: a name for the joint doctrines which pass on spiritual knowledge; also called the Great White Brotherhood. These schools work according to invariable principles and in their structure and mode of operation they can reflect what is called: the 'order of things'. The Tradition carries on the mystical education. For certain reasons this often takes place through a system of initiations. Our soul personality is accessible to symbolism and tradition. They form the spiritual nourishment. This is why the mystical fraternities supply us with this special food. The body is fed in an earthly manner with chemical elements. The soul personality is fed in a different way. Why this is necessary is a mystery of the human personality. It just needs two kinds of nourishment, and the spiritual food creates and generates warmth and love. This is taken into account in the esoteric schools. It is the reason why traditional initiations are kept, and the fraternities themselves are initiated in a traditional manner also.

In the esoteric schools the Tradition is kept guard over. We find this underlined in rituals and degree initiations, and with confirmations on oath and membership installations. Thus a holy duty is continued, and no era, however clouded, has been able to extinguish this light, this Tradition. It is certainly not something to neglect. It involves an instrument of alchemical beauty. The esoteric schools are the guardians of Knowledge, and try to continue human civilization on its highest level. This is among other things done through various forms of education.

First of all there is the intellectual education. The essence of the esoteric schools, of the existing philosophies and the patterns in nature, are explained through an intellectual survey.

Secondly there is the instinctive education. It takes shape among other things through the phraseology in the tuition, through any possible rituals and what is related to them, and through the spirit of brotherhood that allies the members.

Thirdly, together these elements discharge into a training by the higher self. Attuning to a higher consciousness activates the inner powers of observation and makes us learn to live in harmony with the promptings of the self. Then the experiences rise above the level where they can be conveyed in words. They emanate from us automatically. Because they are personal we should cherish them as a personal achievement. This is why they are not discussed with others in detail.

The fourth education, the ethical one, running like a thread through everything, teaches to recognize the importance of proper thinking and acting and of putting our mystical experience into practice in the right manner. It points out to us that feeling and mind have to be merged in a

harmonic way and is an aspect of the intellectual education. Neither of both would separately be able to provide an entirely attuned personality. For that the equilibrium is required between mind, emotion and higher self.

In the esoteric school the various forms of tuition do neither occur sharply separated nor occur chronologically. There is a constant dosing of a small amount of the one and a small amount of the other. An esoteric school is a brotherhood that uses the instruments of meditation, contemplation and concentration. To them it adds breathing exercises and relaxation exercises. This is the fifth education in the range, the practical instruction. Everything is put together harmonically. Thus the Great Work comes into being, from the noblest thoughts, objectives and deeds of man.

The esoteric schools teach laws of nature, but aimed at the way man functions in his earthly and spiritual environment. Often scientific discoveries confirm the instruction given for centuries on end by the mystical schools. The superficial observer might come to the conclusion that it is a matter of time and science will have superseded the knowledge of the esoteric schools. This misrepresents the function of mysticism, but also of science and the causes on which both are dependent. For science and mysticism both keep developing continuously. If we recognize that the source on which the mystic can draw is the same as the one from which the practitioner of science gets his inspiration, we will understand this.

The university teaches certain laws of nature. By his attuning to a particular field the student makes discoveries which give his development an impulse. He masters what he was taught on the university and becomes attuned to what we can call the aura of his science. Thus his awareness increases, which leads him to discoveries in his domain. These can be brilliant flashes, depending on the degree to which he is open to them. He will have to develop an ethical understanding to be able to apply the acquired knowledge positively.

The mystic follows a similar way. Through the instruction in the esoteric school he takes cognizance of inner laws and also along other paths he acquires knowledge. No longer in the esoteric school only, but also directly proceeding from the higher self. These laws comprise his whole existence. The world that the mystic attunes to, is just as comprehensive as the one with which the academic keeps himself busy. The cosmic science crystallizes and enters the mind of mystics and of the practitioners of regular science. There are many scientists who have a healthy respect for the secrets of nature. Mysticism and science are no antipodals and must not be considered as such. They are in line. Mystical perception discharges into science and vice versa. We must give science the place it deserves. If it goes hand in hand with the mystical attitude that characterizes the seeker on the path, we have the fortunate combination that the world longs for, namely science with a conscience and with a vision. Only this way and no other can the academics serve the world and will science not be practised for selfish reasons. Mysticism and science are at their best if they recognize each other as two facets of the same endeavour: the achieving of knowledge and insight.

The esoteric schools aim at imparting to their members knowledge that initiates insight. Man derives knowledge from the universal intellect. He keeps the gained insights and passes them on. They end up with people who on their turn attune and gain knowledge, which they pass on afterwards. Both the lower and higher principles of creation are of interest, but the pupils are driven to the esoteric school even before they have a good eye for the contents thereof. It is as if the appeal is a reaction to their need for development. The pupil is called, but at the onset he can

only be receptive to a small part of that impulse and react to it. This precludes a certain overheating of his system.

The first magnetic action from the esoteric school is accompanied by a small, but very effective impulse, by giving the pupil a picture of what he may achieve. Then this picture is taken away from him again. The applicant will not rest until he has recaptured what was taken from him almost immediately. The esoteric school has as its task to assist the student in his quest for insight. It indicates the direction and prepares the student for his new life. He keeps in mind the visions that were shown him, is totally absorbed in his mystical work and has the impression that it has always been waiting for him. Perhaps he does not know that the school serves him only as a signpost, and that his exertion and the enthusiasm that he displays will automatically lead him to the target along the beaten track.

The school, if it can truly be rated among the esoteric schools, works as a circle within which everybody undertakes to do part of the instruction. One feels lent out so to speak to the esoteric school and in exchange for the tuition offers one's help, everywhere where it is opportune in the work. The activity of the school is misunderstood as long as one fails to see that somebody gets there through his personal evolution. As soon as the students recognize that they cannot owe their progress to the teachings that they have received, they are on the right track. They will walk a different path, meet one another, attend lessons collectively and acquire a wealth of spiritual wisdom. Their different background and ability must manifest themselves, in the same way as it happens in other areas.

Within the esoteric school the student can find the instruments to reveal what is hidden, to develop the powers that lie dormant in him. Through it the differences that exist with others are emphasized, but not in a negative sense. The flourishing personalities reveal more and more of the cosmic fire. They stimulate each other and create their own path in cooperation with others, through whom they get to the necessary reflection. In the reflection the student recognizes himself in other students. They consider each other as the fertile soil on which they can thrive, and share the progress. The students add to each other, do not take anything away from each other. Because of the special way that they walk, no struggle for power may take place in the esoteric school. From a mystical point of view such a struggle is not only detrimental but also useless, for it is associated with the ego. The ego is that part of the mind that has to be transmuted by the pupil.

The vision of the mystic on leadership has to do with his aversion to power struggle. It palls on him, falls outside his wavelength. He is aimed at helpfulness and should only know how not to resist. In the combined practising of the *savoir-vivre* every search for power and influence becomes faint automatically, because they are only the exponents - and not the purpose - of an advanced personality. A fraternity can very well flourish without the practices that go in everyday life.

A mystical school is a miraculous body. It is run according to certain rules like any other organization, but is of a special nature. Whereas some earthly organizations form cumbersome bodies which consider themselves indispensable and most often live beyond their usefulness, the esoteric school is a continuation of an invisible brotherhood. The actual work is not done within the visible organization, but within the invisible one. It may be that someone presents himself with the visible organization without ever finding entrance to the invisible organization. The hierarchy of the invisible brotherhood is not created by human doing. To be admitted one must be prepared.

All fraternities come together at a certain point, at the mystical experience of the devoted. They gain the experiences that are useful. Other experiences pass or are regarded less important. The impressions are adapted to the keynote of the mystic. He must be receptive to them with his whole being, and his nature determines which school offers him the best opportunities. He also sees changes come about among his fellow students. An insignificant event may give the student the enthusiasm he needs.

Let us spend a moment on the inducements that the mystical student receives. His participating in the esoteric school brings him in its psychical field. The character of his school is spiritual. He harmonizes with it if he is attuned to the sphere covered by it. When the tuning succeeds, he and his fellow students achieve mental harmony. The inspiration of the mystic is supplemented with the psychical nature of the brotherhood that he is part of, and with the unity that he experiences with other mystics. The instruction within the esoteric school stirs up powers in him and shows him how he can control them. Inspired and stimulated he will want to direct this energy.

It looks as if, in addition to the attuning to the higher self, cooperation with other people is a special and indispensable help with the task. And that is the general feeling. It must be possible to become an experienced mystic without having contact with other students. Participating in an association of kindred spirits is no absolute condition for progress. It is possible to work in seclusion. Some take this course, though the question remains if a real growth is possible without any system to achieve knowledge. It would be interesting to know which procedure is followed by the solitary workers. They lack the inspiration that the cooperating with others can give, but perhaps the abiding in the country will give them enough inspiration and strength, or the support of friends. Other mystics need mingling with a crowd, unnoticed by others. It is advantageous if mystics work together and join forces, because the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

Even if we are individualists a place can fall to us within a group of fellow pupils, where we can be ourselves to our heart's content and serve others. Thus unthought-of aptitudes blossom out, partly thanks to the offset that our ego gets. We learn to control it, do not part with it but reforge it into a fair share of competitive spirit that drives us along. Nobody unfolds in the same manner. This expresses itself in the brotherhoods. From the multiple of characters a unique body is forged in which everybody has a role and no one can be missed. Whereas in profane organizations it is often a struggle for certain posts, the true brotherhood will show a relieving lack of it. In the profane world one often fights for oneself, in the brotherhoods with oneself. One prepares oneself for the mystical work and behold: everything flows into its needful shape.

The mutual alliance with fellow travellers on the path does not have to express itself in a special friendship, but is implicitly recognized. Everywhere in the world one is received in state within one's fraternity as an old acquaintance and all barriers cease to exist. This makes it more easy for the student to continue his work. During moments of contemplation he can visualize his fraternity as an earthly and psychical reality. This gives a solidarity that must be experienced to be understood and valued.

The exchanging of experiences is found between mystics only to a certain limit. They have a natural hesitation to speak about their mystical life. Impressions at a spiritual level can hardly be translated in such a way that they are an accurate reproduction of what has taken place. Disclosures cannot damage the great work directly, but by walking into the pitfall of vanity, or by divulging too much personal facts, one can misguide fellow students and others. This is why mystics often refrain from exchanging experiences with companions and the outside world, and

seek the immediate experience, for only that brings complete insight. Among ourselves we often need no words anymore to convey what keeps us occupied most. Once in a while we shall enter into an in-depth discussion with each other. During such discussions more questions are raised than answered. It gives us and our conversation partners abundant food for further exploration. It is a new step to progress, and cooperation is a great reward.

But most of all we are rewarded by our attunement, because that way the profane life will stop moving, as a wheel that is brought to a halt. The gate to greater unity opens. Silently united with the core of our brotherhood we experience how important the work is that requires so much attention, fills so many years of our life. It is impossible to give a faint impression, a rough outline of what can be achieved. It are out of the habit, fairy-like experiences. Their existence is accepted, but as belonging to a world that seems not ours. Yet they belong to us, like the sensorial experiences belong to the physical body.

6. Mysticism - an escape?

Should it not be imputed to us personally, then we may know it from the common reactions of society to mystical activity: mysticism is said to be an escape from reality. Customarily one makes one's way to the mystical path out of a need to improve oneself and to have a better understanding of the world and oneself. Sometimes the quest is an escape from the world. Sometimes, and not as a rule, as many opponents of the devoted would like us to believe, for more often it is an attempt to escape from the superficiality of the world and to set foot in a better sphere. Every human being seeks happiness. The greater part of humanity seeks it in a conventional, inconspicuous manner. The remaining people do it differently. This does not implicate that they shirk out of their obligations or withdraw from reality out of fear for a confrontation with it. But they do distance themselves from unfruitful, unpleasant and trivial circumstances.

Whether we value an alternative path of life, depends on the appearance of reality and the consequences of a confrontation with it. If reality disclaims everything that is good we should strive for a change. If a confrontation with reality prevents us from meeting the higher self we must withdraw, but only to dispose of the barriers, to return to the world we left and to assist in changing it.

The usual, consumptive way of life and everything that goes with it, cannot satisfy permanently as it appears. The discontentment generated by it, will with some lead to the desire for something better, away from the depressing, towards something that seems to have value. They withdraw from the restrictions of common reality and try to bring light into it. To work on the progress of human civilization and turn away from what stands in its way cannot be called escaping. It does not become critics to accuse the mystics of escaping, if at the same time it is not indicated what should be wrong with mysticism.

Escaping is a negatively charged notion used by different people for very divergent situations. One can look at it from a psychiatric, pedagogical or sociological stance. If someone reproaches another person with escaping, it may tell something about the attitude of mind of the one who utters the accusation. Sometimes it has to do with a lack of insight. People are biased or simply wrongly informed. If somebody has a long working day behind him and relaxes in front of the television some call this relaxation, others call it an escape. But among those who reject television, there are those who for uncertain reasons do not call attending a concert or an opera an escape but a sensible use of leisure.

Every behaviour has a purpose and meets a need. We can but hope that behaviour and chosen aim lead us to harmony and bring out the best in us. Some behaviour is collective, like watching television, taking a spell off in an outdoor café or going on holiday. Everybody who goes on holiday does this to get away from it all for a while and to leave everything behind. Society does not disapprove of this, because everybody does it. It is understood that it is useful and temporary and for that reason it is accepted. For is it not true that everybody just goes back to work again when coming back from holiday? He who does not participate in this type of time arrangement is regarded an eccentric.

The series of examples of collective behaviour can be extended effortlessly and all these things are worth an extensive survey. We can look at the most principal aspect. Mystics focus in the first place on what they need inwardly. They consider the notion 'know thyself' of paramount importance. We must descend deeply in ourselves to discover the true motives for our behaviour. Meditation is one of the best methods to recover those motives.

Is mysticism a negation of reality? Let us give our definition of escaping another look. One element of it was that we want to avoid an unpleasant situation. Our common sense tells us that this is only logical. Why should we prefer to remain in an awkward situation? We look for an environment where we feel safe and sheltered, where we meet with understanding and can develop our ideals. The mystic has this in common with somebody who chooses a nonmystical way, but the ways that are common in the outer world to reach these purposes, differ from ours. This is the source of the resistance against mysticism. Because its methods are in the minority they become the subject of opposition.

The mystical way is not suitable for everybody. It remains reserved for the individual who, through attuning to the higher self, wants to struggle out of the obstructions that have been imposed on him. What characterizes this individual? He is so aware of his situation that he recognizes that it is not optimal for his development. He is so persevering that he goes to great lengths to do something about the situation. He is so intelligent that he realizes that he must search for a way leading to the opposite of the situation that he tries to extricate himself from. He is so humanitarian that he realizes that the new life situation must not only benefit himself, but should help others as well. He is so realistic as to know that all roads lead to Rome. He is so experienced that he knows that only mystical education that does justice to the material and spiritual side of his personality can bring him there where he is at home and must of necessity be.

Is the mystic an escapee? Let us all answer this question for ourselves. But it is good to call to mind one thing. Many a person who without a blush embarks upon an academic study for which he must spend six or seven years of his life deeply bent over his books, would think a hundred times before walking the way of the mystic if in advance he knew what it would entail. A study that literally takes up dozens of years if not a whole life. There is no threshold, no impediment, no trial that the serious pupil does not have to face, if through the shrouds around him he carves his own way up. No terror is spared him. He is offered chance after chance to retrace his footsteps. Every scratch that he can get from the thorns along his path, he will get. The path is only for the strongest. Can this be called escaping? Could anybody who looks for an easy way out prefer an escape route that is so full of pitfalls, so full of seducing voices that want to talk him out of his good intentions, with so many promptings to undermine him?

What we call a problem in the outside world is comfortable compared with the way of the mystic. And that is well. Only by walking the path one gets stronger. Only by assisting others one deserves illumination. Only by exerting oneself one deserves the reward. Above all the path takes us where we want to be, to the target we have set ourselves. And, although the foregoing suggests differently, it is not only a track of trial. On it we find companionship, love, brotherhood and humour.

7. Being an apprentice

He who looks at a beautiful overcast sky and feels happy by doing so, is initiated into the beauty of nature. One can be initiated in many different ways, which causes a different effect every time. Seeing the connection between the laws of nature or the beauty in the endeavour of some human beings also works as an initiation. We can be initiated in profane life, at school, during our work, during conversation with friends or in the mystical labour that comprises all of this at the same time. Sometimes it is a small initiation, sometimes it goes further. We initiate ourselves, or are initiated by somebody else, or by a situation or a force.

Mystical methods of working can put us on the trail of great truths. They are direction indicators which reveal to us a reality that cannot be conveyed in so many words in personal education. He who sides with the sublime and the beautiful becomes allied with it. It is going to be a part of his personality. The Sufi mystic Hazrat Inayat Khan says: "The human soul is endowed with everything that it absorbs and this will become the soul." By applying the mystical principles we reach the stage where we recognize the truth of this maxim, although the progress of the soul personality goes so gradually that an incarnation is over without us having the feeling that we have made any progress.

Our experiences are a little ripple on the cosmic ocean but they are real. Even a dream often strikes us because it is so lucid. Our individual task can make a negligible impression if we isolate it from our surroundings. But is it not so, that even the strength of a majestic pyramid is determined by the separate stones from which it is constructed? It is not necessary that we pose as a weak stone. By opening our minds to inspiring influences we conceive ideas and then we must go to work ourselves.

In the course of the years many books have been published in which is narrated about a student who undertakes dangerous journeys, after which he is initiated in the East. We read that he endures many deprivations, is tested by many challenges and thus achieves his aim. He meets many deceivers on his way, many dangers. He climbs high mountains and is led to great masters in a mysterious way, far away from the civilized world. At the onset he has to deal with outer barriers, outer worlds, which as yet bar his entrance to the mystical, inner paradise.

We are inclined to identify ourselves with this hero, because in him we find our own struggle reflected that we put up to bring the inner self to manifestation. This struggle is heavier nor easier. It is merely our own. The stories mentioned are metaphors. They reveal valuable mystical principles. They are means, helping us to accomplish our journey. The student expects that his path of initiation strikes the eye. No wonder, for after having lived a life without special spiritual events or developments, an initiation as described by mystics surely must disclose something special to him, preferably in a manner visible to everybody, or in a supernatural fashion.

A series of initiations is special indeed, but for a completely different reason, which is, that it does not announce itself in the shape that one might wish or at least expects. The principles of the universe are simple. It are these principles that the pupil seeks, that he tries to fathom. They are imparted to him through initiation. He can make himself familiar with them, unite with them. If we keep this in mind, the nature of initiations will not likely be misunderstood. They need not always be visible, spectacular or unique. What they are is obvious. The candidate must walk the paths again that he has already walked. He notices a difference for now he walks the way very knowingly. All trivial things does the initiate find on his path again. The initiation shows him how the everyday things work, what their role is in the life that he leads. His attitude towards nature is the key to genuine mastery of life. He must be modest and begin at the bottom

of the ladder. Through the initiations he completes every possible stage of the life he has led. A revaluation takes place of all his deeds and thoughts. He meets the same people, gets in the same situations with them but acts differently.

Initiation is a means and no goal. A key to the development of our personality. It polishes one of our facets. Initiation surfaces the irregularities of the life that we lead, in order that we may discover the great light that gives us inspiration. That is why it is said in mysticism that a candidate can initiate himself. We must set to work ourselves, in the first instance in the very everyday sphere. The biggest trials are in the smallest things. We do see the big boulders on the path. With a little bit of effort they are by-passed. But we stumble over a pebble. The path of the initiate is strewn with little stones. Step by step he must take those hurdles.

The true initiations are, as is also suggested in many mystical books, a magnificent adventure. Initiation and trial go hand in hand. Sometimes a piece of the road is traversed with great difficulty, but along the way there are plateaus where it is nice to stay. One can repose there or go through initiations that are not that drastic. In the mean time the pupil better and better reflects the great light that he seeks and to which - consequently - he is on the way.

Progressing on the path brings slow progress, but if we think that with our attempts we only enter other, outer worlds, no matter how sublime, then we are wrong. The mystical advocate of zealot certainly ends up in a better world. But except going forward to a new outer world he inwardly makes another journey, to an inner world. So an outside world is not the final destination. There is a parallel development on a second path. On the crossing between the outside world and the inner world we are confronted with ourselves, like a being that is made up of two halves that want to form a unity together. Because this is such an important point, right-minded students should not have themselves be diverted by the small and big problems that they are faced with regularly. They had better take an interest in things of direct use for their development. Without trials no mastery is achieved. Many writings from ancient times and the experiences of the mystics confirm this.

Many myths speak of a descent into dark depths and of the light that finally triumphs. There are spheres which are impassable, fatal for those who might want to force the entrance open. But for the mystic do education, assiduousness, dedication and patience mean the authentic keys to a land where he is safe. It is important that we keep our eyes and ears open for every indication that helps us to make the difficult transition to the mystical life. A transition dominated by personal trial, and making helping hands indispensable. There are several phases that the intransigent goes through. He sometimes finds himself in the middle of the waves. People push him, in the hope that he removes his foot from the path that he wishes to walk. He will discover this in many ways. The confrontation with these negative influences is necessary. The student can use the negative for his mystical growth.

At the beginning we do not know what to choose: the attitude of uncertainty and doubt, or that of certainty and confidence. The choice is not prescribed to us by the circumstances. Do we want confidence? Then confidence falls to us. Do we want to be uncertain? We shall be it. In the early stages we take the first important step. We decide whether to continue or to stop. If we continue we have won the first stroke, which gives assurance and quiets doubt. This choice is not once-only. It will be asked of us several times on the path.

After a while we notice a different kind of struggle. In our fervour we go so far as aiming at complete disengagement. We have heard that this is difficult and therefore we want to attain it,

until it is proved that the remedy may be worse than the disease. In stead of being detached and happy, we lose all incentives that a sound going about with matter can give. We become unhappy. Nothing can appeal to us anymore. All pleasures are spoiled by gloomy thoughts with regard to their seeming reality. We lose every healthy interest in material affairs, whereas this interest suits us because we are dual.

This is a fleeting crisis, but now another problem comes into being. The overrating of all earthly things which was followed by too forced a pursuit of detachment, once again changes into an opposite, namely in overvaluing the spiritual sphere. When we start with mystical education we expect that the experiences in its sphere will be very strange, almost not human. But to what else should an experience be attached than to our typically human mind? What would be the point in learning something at a level or in a place where we are indifferent to it?

Here the law of duality forces us to an equilibrium. The earthly and the spiritual things must be brought into line. When we continue our study, slowly the thought forges ahead that nature cannot be fathomed with the mind or with the feeling. There must be contact with the higher, the spiritual self.

Yet another problem occurs. We preferably nourish a personified image of God, because it is a means to conceptualize the divine. Otherwise it would stay removed from us too far. Mysticism on the other hand refrains from a personified image of God, to enable the pupil to visualize 'the god of his heart'. That does not make it any simpler. The student senses that the personified image of God does not satisfy. He may feel tempted to choose a personal teacher, who is going to function as a substitute for the repressed image of God. In this phase on the other hand he may let go all familiar ideas and end up in a no man's land where he only thinks of bleak laws of nature. But he will also have to abstain from the thought that god is a law of nature, if he really wants to develop as a child trying to stand on its own feet. He wrestles with the human make-up that likes to have a master, a tangible expression of the spiritual, as an understanding parent to whom one occasionally unburdens one's heart. He wants to be able to see something of higher things, in a tangible form.

Slowly an equilibrium originates between the extremes of total disengagement and material idolization, and of the personal image of God and a universal concept of God. The material aspects of this equilibrium consist of a sound and balanced use of what matter offers us, and of putting our possessions into perspective in stead of despising them. Spiritual development makes matter less important, without us minimalizing it and disposing of it. The image of God remains, but it becomes the highly personal reflection of what we consider to be the most important principle. It is no longer a person, no law of nature, but it comprises all this.

As we wrestle we climb further on the road that leads to our authentic self. Our image of good and evil will change, because we learn to listen better and better to the tranquil voice on the inside that makes us less dependent. We hold strong views about many issues. They need not become obsolete. Maybe they are subject to change, as the result of our attitude of mind. The attitude determines our life much more than our environment does. A reversal of values can take place. Things that fascinated us lose their appeal and what we detested we understand better. Moral development takes a different direction. We solve material and psychical questions through the right effort. We let them work for us in stead of against us.

In regard to many phenomena understanding wakens up. Everything has two sides. Little is distinctly negative or positive. When we seriously give attention to the nature and purpose of both the negative and the positive, we shall learn that these phenomena have a place in the greater whole. It takes time to come to understand this. From the long heating and distilling of

the qualities of our personality originates what the alchemists call the philosopher's stone. This process of 'fatiguing' provides as its first product: self-confidence. When this is lacking one is literally powerless, but when it is developed the philosopher's stone appears. Like metal that in the long term gets warm and acquires flexibility if it is incessantly bent and bent back, we can bring our being to flexibility by repeated exertion. If the effort is continued the moment comes that we reach the breaking point, just like the metal.

When our eye falls on a trait that is capable of improvement we can pay all our attention to it. We regularly fix a few targets. It will require many toilsome attempts to actually bring about improvements, as if we ascend the mountain along a winding road. When we devote ourselves to the purpose without stint, then the good intentions are lived up to. It brings us on a new breaking point that contributes to the illumination that we long for so very strongly, and that gives a grand view on the landscape lying in front of us. When we bring our ego at a higher level we exercise an influence on our environment. We are not unrelated to what surrounds us. If we are of good will, we shall attract the positive that is available in our environment. If it is not there, we create it. The environment consists of gold ore, that comes to melting through our warmth. We free the gold from the ore because we get rid of all cinders.

A trial that probably will present itself is the notion that we are obliged to love every human being. From what we know about mystics the picture comes up of educated personalities who have left all earthly enmities far behind them. A too hasty conclusion might be that they must therefore be on friendly terms with all people and will love everybody. The truth is that the mystic manages to create harmony between himself and his environment and between himself and his higher nature. Therefore he seldom comes into conflict with somebody but he will not be able to love everybody.

Why do we expect this to be otherwise? There is an intellectual, culturally determined understanding of the ideal mystic. The picture that one has of him does not take into account that he is a normal human being, with the same feelings as everybody has. One thinks that he can work up the same sublime feeling for everybody in his desire not to wrong anybody as far as love is concerned. But this is an impossible task. Not everything that is positive at the first glance is positive to higher criterions, since there is the law of attraction and repulsion. Nature cannot be forced. There are beings that attract each other and beings so different that they are indifferent to each other or reject one another.

To what extent must we love others? When we fully try to understand other beings, give room to their urge to develop themselves and render them assistance as much as we can, then we give love. This love is not mainly individual. Different kinds of love can very well exist side by side. This leads to a new question. To what extent must we leave the other person free in his personal development and when may we make our voice heard? How far does our tolerance go, how far may it go and where must it stop? That decision depends on the motive with which we act, of its purport and of the interests that we safeguard or damage with it. There are personalities that embody evil and wittingly cause damage to the human cause. To put it bluntly: it is not possible to love these people. One will have to counterpoise them. How then do we determine if we may let the other be free in his development? Our inner voice must answer this. As the highest authority it determines whether we must raise our voice or not say a word.

Heavy taxes are attached to the mind of the neophyte which fortunately are not collected simultaneously. One by one situations appear to him in which he must make a stand. Never

before he had to puzzle his head over it. Life draws him into the vortex of old problems that he thought he had already dealt with. He seldom has a moment's peace and must make a supreme effort. The mystic knows the greatest joy and the deepest grief. By turns he is 'himmelhoch jauchzend' and 'zum Tode betrübt'. There are several kinds of joy. There is a joy that is superficial and momentary. It certainly has a role in life. Life however is not complete if we do not know what mystical joy is. Why should we not feel relieved when we take our spiritual development in hand? Why should we not be deeply satisfied when our mind keeps itself engaged with the lofty things in life and goes into the miracles of mystical perception? The world would not be dual however if there were no grief. There is earthly grief and there is mystical grief. The customary joy and the customary grief may go together and also the mystical joy may at one and the same moment unite with mystical grief.

It is not quite possible to maintain the attuning to the higher self for a long time without a period of preparation. All too often we fall back to a lower level and sometimes it degenerates into a period of instability. This lack of constancy must be temporarily, a phase. We climb out of this abyss again by the remembrance of some mystical keys. They have been shown us in the older days for a short moment and have been taken away again. We must spend all our time to regain possession of the keys, in the knowledge that they return the quicker the more we are receptive.

No matter how important the intention of the pupil may be, he keeps realizing that he is limited. Few students will be satisfied with what they achieve. This may explain why they show progress constantly. The impulses of the higher self are strong. Everybody is free to resist them. Being attracted by the universal source of knowledge accentuates our imperfection. That need not be frustrating. For it is not the kind of imperfection disapproved by the world. There imperfection may mean that the ego has not yet gained the position that it should have according to everybody. Whether the personality suffers a loss under pursuing such material purposes is seldom point of discussion. The imperfection or rather the reverence that the mystic experiences, stems from the insight that he is only a small particle of the overwhelming beauty of nature.

We learn to set foot on the path of knowledge and to arm ourselves against the influences that want to prevent this. In our search for knowledge and wisdom we are obliged to be observant, alert, ready to use the old and new truths well. Our spiritual quest involves the constructing of defensive works. We learn to reproduce the discovered truths in an obscured way and to protect them through it. We learn to distinguish who needs or does not need help, where, how and why; and how we can be of use in the situation. Because we do everything to complete the incomplete, an appeal will be made to us more often. By this the outside world increases the responsibility of the mystical student and gives him uncounted opportunities to set to work.

Although we choose the mystical path voluntarily, we are compelled to defend ourselves. With the word 'voluntarily' we think of an exercise of the will that originates from ourselves. With the word 'compelled' we think of an exercise of the will that comes from somebody else. With the mystic the desire to follow the mystical path comes from himself, and also the urge to defend himself ultimately comes from himself, not from somebody else. His desire to grow mystically is of his own volition. The attacks he has to endure he can deal with in two ways. He ignores them of his own free will or he immediately takes appropriate measures, also of his own free will.

When he is passive he will taste defeat. If he takes measures he protects himself and the work

with which he is occupied. This asks for dedication. As soon as he has decided to make a supreme effort to defy all attacks, he exposes himself to counteractions. Because he experiences counteractions he makes a stand. By making a stand he develops strength. And with strength he conquers. He more and more relies on the higher self that as a result of this also plays an important role in the future.

For the outside world it becomes noticeable that something special takes place inside the mystical student. One feels attracted by his magnetic effluvium and the evenness that he displays in his moods. A certain stability becomes manifest. The student progresses in the personal sphere and also gains influence in society. It appears to him that the things asked of him are too difficult. Experience teaches him that he need not do anything that exceeds his capacities. He can attune to a level of reality that will hit him as an electric current in all his fibres. The energy that fulfils him recharges his system in each case. Then it is no longer difficult to act in the right manner and give out light, for even the limitations are limited. The light has first penetrated the self of the pupil. He is the first who is illuminated by it. Everything that reveals itself via him, has been lived through by him first. Thereafter it manifests itself to the outside world.

There is no reason for fear or helplessness. Equilibrium, personal peace, understanding and confidence are ageless and approach us automatically, if we do not give up. This is the gold made by the true alchemists. It outshines the earthly gold. There is no time-limit on the study of mystical principles. Mysticism very much differs from a hobby. It is a way of life, oriented towards the human who creates a new dimension in his life, and who is not able or wanting to restrict it to the exterior of his personality. The university of the student of mysticism is the world. Only there he can learn, only there spread his knowledge. A reciprocity takes place. By the world the mystic is thrown upon his own resources. He learns to know himself and better finds his place in society. He who assists his fellow man is recognized by his positive thinking. Whoever is faced with such a person will be inspired by him and for his part inspire others, just as when a stone thrown in the pond causes numberless ripples.

8. The inner self

In mysticism it is easy to lapse into a particular terminology. There is nothing against it if only we agree what is understood by the various terms. A number of them are defined at the back of this book. For now, we shall take a glimpse at the terms that deal with personality. The words higher self, inner master, soul personality and inner self are fairly often confused whereas they are not equal. In many cultures people know characterizations for the sections of the personality of man. The levels of consciousness or personality transcending that of mankind are also given names.

The first level of consciousness that we can distinguish is the soul. It is far from easy to give a good definition of it. Therefore let us merely define the soul as a projection of the highest laws of nature, that we all can be open to. A conception that can be treated as equal with it, is the inner master or the higher self. When we discuss the inner master we talk about a voice speaking to us when we are attuned to the spiritual world. This voice is capable of giving us an impression of what is right, and is a reflection of the sphere that we tend to call cosmos intelligence. The inner master therefore is not the same as the soul personality.

An aspect of the inner master is the soul personality. In our philosophy it is an energy that has individuality and personality and knows a psychic self-awareness. The soul personality gains experiences, through which it ever changes and distinguishes itself from other soul personalities. It is said that even the most inveterate enemy of good would hear the voice of his inner master if only he would open his mind to it. If such a person has a negative radiance this must come from his soul personality; it cannot come from the perfect character of the inner master or soul.

The body, finally, is the vehicle for the soul personality in which the latter can manifest itself and gain experiences. When we talk about the soul we speak about the root of man, that needs no improvement, perfect as it is in its own essence. For the soul the soul personality is a cloak. And, again, for the soul personality the body is a cloak.

Let us conceive that the core is situated in a circle. The core represents our soul, the true particle of heavenly light, a direct utterance of divine consciousness. The circle around the core delimits the soul personality which stretches out between the core and the wall of the circle. In that space our experiences are coloured, so to speak. The colours which originate may be considered as the aura of the soul personality. Now let us picture a second circle around the first. It bounds the body with all its gradations of health, represented by the space between the inner and the outer circle. The distance between the core and the inner circle and the inner and the outer circle, differs from person to person and gives us an impression of the degree to which our thoughts and actions are perfected. When these are sublime the sphere between the circles gets the right colour and a corresponding character and appearance. When the attuning to the higher levels of consciousness increases, the inner circle gets bigger. When thinking and acting answer to the sublime nature of the core, our soul personality radiates more light until the soul personality represents the highest divine consciousness. Then one talks about a heavenly illuminated soul personality that in its most sublime form is an avatar. It is the illuminated human who continuously demonstrates the sacredness of the cosmic laws.

Somebody who devotes his life to improving his thoughts and deeds so that they get better

attuned to his higher self, not only has a sound psychical aura - in our comparison the space between the core and the inner circle -, but also a healthy physical radiance, symbolized by the space between the inner and the outer circle. There the physical aura expresses itself as a magnetic attractive force. He who is attuned to it can distinguish both the one and the other aura. It is possible that the physical aura of a spiritually development human being is weakened, which can be normal, especially in the last stage of life. Conversely, a strong physical aura does not establish that somebody is spiritually awakened. From the aura around the centre it can be gathered which experiences the soul personality has gone through and on which spoke of the cosmic wheel it is situated. When we try to assess the character of people we do this via the aura of their soul personality. Not via their physical aura.

The soul personality reflects our experiences, thoughts and moods. Before we can contact the inner master we pass our soul personality. It is an interesting question which 'self' the Greeks meant when they incited us: "Know thyself." There is a case for relating it to our soul personality. If we know our self, our soul personality, we learn to be receptive to the inner master, the higher self.

9. Eyes

According to an old saying the eyes are the windows or the mirrors of the soul. When we get acquainted with someone our attention is drawn to his face, clothing and manners. We also seek contact with his eyes. There is a multiplicity of magnitude of the eye, the iris and the pupil, and in the colour and the entourage or setting. We take heed of the in-between distance of the eyes, their relation to the rest of the face, their brightness and radiation power. They can tell us a lot about the person to which they belong. When his patients enter, a good physician can often tell by their eyes whether they have something wrong, or he may definitely say something about their state of health.

We find it difficult to make contact with somebody who misses the light in his eyes. Much more difficult than with somebody who has lost the use of some other sense. If somebody does not eye us during a conversation, he does not like us, has to hide something, or is afraid to betray himself; or he is unreliable, wishes to shut us out or not to show his emotions. We all unconsciously take our departure from the idea that we find access to the essence of a human being via his eyes. From the look that can be dreamy, passive, as well as probing, seductive, radiating, active, we can tell many emotions and frames of mind and sometimes see what the other person thinks.

Eyes may provide us with a deep insight in someone's real essence. Much can be told from them. Shyness, courage, suspicion, contentedness, fear, arrogance, mockery, madness, happiness, hate, amiability, passion, confidence, greed, goodness, sorrow, brightness, illness, tolerance, cunning, understanding, despondency, generosity, joy and grief.

10. Spiritual development

Personal progress is what it is: personal. There is no point in parading just to show our hard labour, or the experimental way how we approach nature and the inner world. But it is advantageous to check the use and application of the knowledge that arises from it. Progress is a random indication on the way to mastery of life. It is only worth a discussion with people who understand what we are talking about. There is no point in sharing our experiences in detail with other people. Our adventures are not theirs and vice versa. In a private talk we can divulge somewhat more of our personal life. That depends on the situation. There must be a certain attunement between the discussion partners that makes an exchange of ideas fruitful for both participants.

In daily life our capacities come to light. They differ from man to man, also in the psychical and mystical sphere. Our interests differ and mystics therefore are not familiar with every mystical field. Every mystic has a territory that he is especially familiar with. When he performs certain activities well, he must not hint that too much. It may discourage someone who has just begun to set foot on the mystical path. It may undermine that person's perseverance whereby he does not notice what his own capabilities are. Every human must get the room to discover for himself how he can draw on his inner source.

The way we respond to good or less pleasant things indicates more than anything whether we progress on the mystical path. The good things are indeed an indication as well, for it is not that simple to react in the right manner if we experience something pleasant. Happiness can turn to a flash of excitement, with all its additional effects. The power of discernment is the first victim: the joy seems to be eternal, but is no longer in proportion to the cause. What it comes down to when we deal with a pleasant occurrence is that we must remain attuned to the wishes of the higher self. It matters all the more with events that are unpleasant or sorrowful, for humanly on such a moment we cannot always summon objectivity. Our reasoning power labels everything that happens to us in these cases negative or hopeless. Our subjective self tells us quite a different story, but that voice may have retreated into the background and can hardly be heard anymore.

If in life we would constantly give positive or negative robot-like reactions, it would not contribute to the acquiring of a personality with a rich inner life. For we would react in the same way over and over again if the same fact occurs again, as if we are an electrical switch which, after it has received an electrical impulse, can only react with opening and closing. But because we are no robots we react with constantly varying feelings and emotions. This is a very normal and natural response that belongs to life. If it would end with this we would not get attuned to the higher self. For that, contemplation and soul-searching is needed. If we confront ourselves often enough with our reactions, we find that the circumstances not inherently and spontaneously have to bring about a reaction that we call positive or negative. This reaction is much more influenced by our memory and the formerly gained experiences, and it is the mirror of our progress.

Making progress is very relative. The path that others follow may have been ours. The path that we walk has been walked by others, or they will walk it someday. Everybody has his own formula and for all of us the way leads to the light. It is less important to think in the same

manner than to have a common purpose, no matter how it is formulated. This effort rewards itself. During the quest progress is gradually made, while we go through all kinds of mental stages. The advanced seeker will never forget the struggles that he has had on a comparable point of the journey. He knows the kinds of emotions of the neophyte, his abandonment and hope, his fear and uncertainty, his speculations and wrestlings. But also the reward that comes when the difficulties from the initial stages are over and done with.

Trials will keep coming on our further journey, which does not have to discourage. As soon as we got a new arithmetic book at school, we looked at the back for a moment to see how far the subjects went. How could we ever learn what would be demanded of us in the last chapters? Once we got round to it we did not care that much anymore, because we were well prepared. It is the same with mystical instruction. The spiritual trials may increase, but never exceed our powers. Just like doing sums brought us more practical advantages each time, our exercise in the mystical sphere justifies all the preceding difficulties. At the end of a school year it appeared that one figured better than the other. We will never have blamed it on the arithmetic books. It is just that one pupil has more talent or tries better. But nobody could have taught us figuring had we not cooperated ourselves.

There are several opinions about the purport of psychical development. Part of the seekers think that it comprises clairvoyance or the transferring of thoughts, or the power to heal at a distance. When the attention would just be limited to these doubtless important powers of the human mind, it would do no justice to the deeper and more encompassing meaning of psychical development. Although the techniques that prime second sight or similar powers are part of the broad gamut of mystical teachings, developing the power of extrasensory perception is not the same as working on mystical growth. It may go hand in hand. Mystical activity increases the sensitivity for impressions, from which a different view on life automatically comes into being. The development aims at the acquiring of insight: who is man actually, what do his abilities consist of and how can he attune his whole person to the deeper forces of nature. Attunement is the way to activate powers. Therefore it comes as no surprise that clairvoyance is a result of the protracted labouring in the spiritual sphere.

However it is only one of the many possible results. Foreseeing events in the near or far future is something totally different from achieving contact with the higher self. Both are nevertheless forms of extrasensory perception, of attuning to higher levels of consciousness. Foreseeing future events does not bring the life of the mystic on a higher plane, in contrast with the illuminating contact, that indeed influences his development. This contact transforms him and takes him to new stages of awareness. Developing clairvoyance is no precondition for leading an illuminated life, nor does spiritual development always go with clairvoyancy. The mind reacts very differently to the impulses which it receives and this contributes to the colourful journey of us all. The closer we come to the goal, the more room there is for the various mystical wavelengths that we each represent.

The essence of mysticism is the involving of certain methods to enhance the attunement between the outer self (body), the inner self (mental capacity and soul personality) and the higher self (the inner master, the voice on the inside). Also knowing and mastering the laws involved with it, is an important point in mysticism. The harmony that comes into being in the relation between the two first mentioned sides of our being and the higher self, causes the

freshly originated unity to see the world with different eyes. This is not only the feature of mysticism, but also of alchemy. Looking for the philosopher's stone some alchemists neither found the coveted gold, nor themselves. On some the quest had a coincidental, surprising effect. They could not compound gold, but through their investigation they came on to elements in their own being which did go through a transmutation. Through it they fell under the spell of the inner gold.

In our heart a being lies dormant waiting to be listened to. It tries to unite the two worlds that we reside in. It is a creative force, that wants to wake us up from our sleep. Often we seek this force in the outside world, whereas we carry it with us. The work of the pupil is not completed when he has ascertained this, for only then does the Great Work begin for him. He sets to work and knows that the long-lasting struggle for illumination is only in its initial phase.

The universe has a number of instruments that can bring us in harmony or disharmony. The employing of this alchemical armamentarium is not difficult. There is no other laboratory where such great results can be achieved with so little means. However it is not possible for everybody to create a life in harmony. It is an inescapable conclusion that carmic conditions can impose on us a temporary restraint in regard to what we want to realize. Our life can be hard, but the cosmos may also organize it delicately and sweetly. It consists of father, mother, family, friends, material security, possibly wealth, even poverty, the esoteric schools, cosmic training and earthly training, mental and spiritual pleasures, inspiration and dedication. On our moment of birth they have hardly any influence on us. Later they lead us - in the laboratory of life - to harmony or disharmony.

Like in any laboratory the mild-mannered materials are located next to the very aggressive and corrosive ones. Although some chemical products have dangerous qualities they are irrefutably for good reason on the shelf, next to many other chemicals. The dangerous chemicals, even more than the other ones, can only be applied well by an initiate. In our life these chemicals are ambition, temptation, hate, competitive spirit, zest for work, egoism, greed, aggression, dishonesty, inhumanity, delinquency, corruptness and even certain kinds of friendship. All people have equipped their laboratory in their own way. Some enter it with the special skill and intention to improve the good materials and to handle the bad ones in such a manner that, when dosed in the right way, they may serve a purpose with improving the elements that are already in order.

Everyone of us has only ten or twenty people around him who in part determine his incarnation. They reflect our good and bad sides, stimulate us to self-analysis, point out our weaknesses or shortcomings. These people are the environment for our mind, together with everything we read, the tuition we get, the places we visit, the countries and cultures that we are aware of. They are part of our being and if we allow it also a part of our laboratory. The mystic will have to choose his future himself. He must decide whether he wants to develop powers that affect and change his personality, or leave these powers as they are. He chooses a way that is determined by his background. The nature of the psychical and material spheres that he explores depends on the chosen way.

Many forms of progress are possible, as a result of which the mystic is somebody with many faces. He begins at the outside of the mystic wheel and from the far end of one of the spokes he

tries to reach the centre. His work may have brought him on an opposite position of the wheel compared to someone else, but via the opposite ways both can reach the same goal, even if the points of departure differ and the travel is made with different speed.

If the development of a mystic and a nonmystic could be diagrammatized, the picture would be as follows. The nonseeker would represent a line that moves almost horizontally in the graph. The curve climbs, because there is always talk of growth, even if it is not pursued. Going forward brings climbing with it. The line of the mystic goes upward stronger, thanks to a consciously made effort. At the top of the graph there is a horizontal line. The curve keeps rising until, having come to the breaking point, it makes a steeper angle at the horizontal line. He who gets past the line has undergone a transmuting initiation. Transmutation occurs as the result of the quest for illumination. Seeking is a condition to achieve illumination, but it is not illumination itself.

In the distant past the environment determined what the life of man would look like. After he gained control over his mental capacity he determined to an increasing extent what happened to him and slowly he mastered nature. It is the oldest magical work that we know. In the course of time man found out that he could obtain the good by first making a concept. He elaborated that concept and thereupon the mental image was made to materialize. He discovered that he had desires, but found that a desire alone was not sufficient. He had to bring about what he desired by forming a unity with it.

There is a difference between undertaking a quest and accomplishing what has been sought. The first shows the willpower of the awakening consciousness and leads to insight in the way that must be followed to arrive at the target. However it is only the introduction to the actual realization of the target. Man gives shape to what he wishes, by becoming one with it. The esoterics among the Egyptian priests gave a revealing example of it. They knew that there must be no distinction between the wish and the one who formulates the wish. They must converge. Man must assume as it were the shape of the deity.

Conversely, whereas the priests changed man into a god, other early civilizations gave their impersonal god a physical appearance, which by the way the Egyptians also did. The purpose remained the same, namely to restrain the forces of nature through making god and man converge. There are countless situations in which this principle appears to have power. Man is influenced by politics and the world of advertising, which try to convey their ideas through projection and identification. These groupings achieve the desired result if they can persuade their target group to converge with the dished up images.

By realizing step by step what exists in ourselves and to converge with the centre, we come nearer to the goal. Man can fulfil the role of the Egyptian priest by assuming the attitude of the god in him. The more we converge with the higher self, just like the priest, the more we accomplish. One is what one thinks. This notion has close relations with the hierophant who assumes the shape of the gods to conduct his creative work. It also is tied in with the material and transcendental alchemist who, before being able to make gold, must reforge himself into gold. It is the key to mastery of life and mystical labour.

It is up to us to get to know this secret and control it. The faculty of thought, the creative mind,

is a means to that. How we handle it determines our course of life. But the characteristic of the true student who progresses in mysticism is that he is amenable to advice. He makes his own decisions and carries things out himself, but remains open to counsel, no matter from which direction it comes. Sometimes good advice is presented frankly, sometimes offered obliquely. He who is busy with permanent education makes mistakes. That is natural and human. Nothing comes about at once. When climbing the ladder of insight the student cannot skip a number of steps. It is his right to listen or not to listen, to learn or not to learn.

The master does not take over the work of the student. That would be too easy. A positive intention is not enough to get cooperation from all sides. He who finds himself in a deep pit and wants to get out, may be of the opinion that it is sufficient to call upon somebody who stands above at the rim. But this somebody at the very most will throw him a rope ladder. The person in the pit will have to make the ponderous climb himself. Do not expect that a rescuer will descend into the pit, take us on his shoulders and lift us out with great difficulty. Why should the advanced ones degrade themselves to uplift the unwilling or unknowing? They are ready to place their powers at our disposal, providing that we roll up our sleeves and set to work.

11. Nature spirits

Nature attracts us, especially in the spring and this is not by coincidence. In the sprouting life we intuitively recognize the fundamental processes of decomposition and construction. Many forces work together and become visible in the reciprocity between sunrays and receptive earth. Beauty comes towards us. Valleys, mountains and forests, just like the jungle or the waterfall, have magnetic power. They give inspiration. The personifying of elements in nature is founded on the intuitively becoming conscious that they have an almost personal effluvium. In many cultures one is in the habit of seeing the natural phenomena as the utterances of the gods or as the gods themselves. The wind and the thunderstorm are given names of deities and one assumes that nature has its own invisible inhabitants. Thus the stories about elves, fairies and fauns seem to have come into being. To come across the first traces of this we must go far back in history.

Nature spirits form an unusual subject of observation and seem to be related to superstition. Yet this subject has a mystical aspect, which makes it worth while to say something about it. Inorganic as well as organic material sends out energy and our consciousness reacts to it. The reactions take the shape of sensual impressions and emotional perceptions. They lead to knowledge of the visible and invisible worlds. A scenic area that has been charged by the sun glows with energy. It reveals its twofold character to whom attunes to its complete symphony of harmonic energies. Thus one might hear and see the 'nature spirits'.

All outer manifestations bear the stamp of their inner reality. Everything we see hides under the mantle that has been wrapped around the shape. We see the mantle and its shape and because of this we think to see the shape itself. Every fold and every crease we see sharply without really perceiving the personage that is wrapped in the attire. We find ourselves in the midst of shapes that hide their true nature, their true spirit. The crystal for instance hides its nature in the crystalline form that makes it what it is. The true nature of things can only be perceived subtly and in an indirect way through its effect.

Nature has been composed of material elements which in their outer manifestation hide their true force. As an inductor they form resonances, which have their origin in the existing order of things. The human body is another example. It generates vibrations, which become visible owing to a certain structure being available for them. The same goes for animals and plants. When the immaterial principle manifests itself in matter, individuality comes into being. The living organisms in which the cosmos manifests itself can be reduced to their composing elements: the vital energy and the matter connected with it. In nature many kinds of vitalities and receivers work together. Just like the combined body cells shape the body that renders the human personality its expression, thus in a scenic area the joining together of odd parts creates a kind of nature being. The completed whole does originate a new radiance.

We need not visualize nature spirits as satyrs, Panlike beings or little elves. He who walks around in nature and does not analyse too much of what he finds there, gets attuned to the spirit of the environment. What for want of a better term is called nature spirits are the frequencies that arise after the scenic area has been shaped. It are manifestations on the secondary plane. We can call it the very subtle finish of a selfcontained unit.

We are personified vibrations ourselves. By analogy with the human personality we can impute to vibrations a person-ality, an animal-ity or a thing-ality. To every frequency can be attributed a specific character of its own so to speak. These frequencies manifest themselves among other things via our emotions. We talk of the spirit of love, the spirit of beauty. Already in antiquity one spoke of the god of love, the god of the wind, et cetera. A realm of gods was built in which personality and intelligence was attributed to every known vibration.

Some radiances give us a feeling of beatitude and even increase our psychical powers of observation. Possibly this is how in mythology the dialogue arose between men and gods whereby the latter were addressed as if they had a carnal shape. We often think that a human with whom we are in contact, is a much more real phenomenon than such a nature deity. But is this human being, that is so tangible and so material, so much more real? The one with whom we are confronted is not a synonym of his physical body, which is the robe that he has got hung round temporarily. We communicate with a personality built from physical and spiritual elements, and also with the other beings in nature communication is possible. With everything that lives visibly and invisibly an exchange is possible, which the primitive societies put into practice.

12. Conditions of development

Genius reveals itself when elements which apparently have no relationship, are combined in such a manner that an amazing result originates from it. Thanks to an enlightening flash in the consciousness connections become visible or are created which do not exclusively come into being via reasoning. The intuitive and brilliant are gifts that can be developed by attuning the consciousness to the cosmic intellect. It is an ability strengthened and brought into blossom through mystical education.

When the inventor brings about a revolution he is called a genius. He is highly appreciated or reviled. When he discloses that his basic idea stems from somebody else, from a friend whose original plan he has only elaborated, how will the reactions be? The genius of the inventor will be trivialized because he has had someone else's assistance. One may even think that any person might have established the invention that way.

A second situation is conceivable. The inventor tells that he has not hit upon the brilliant idea himself, but received his inspiration from the universal intellect. His own part consisted of further elaborating the idea. In this case the inventor will probably be told that he must not be so modest. After all did he not manage to do the invention himself? That he gives credit to a cosmic source of inspiration does him honour all the more and is typical of his modesty.

Now would it in the first instance not be much more self-evident to call the inventor a genius, because both he and his friend are fallible humans? And in the second instance would we not rather call the inventor a normal, nonbrilliant human being because, if his idea indeed came from the higher spheres, he has had the best help that anyone could imagine? For he who can avail himself of that, can make a bright invention. So, how success is judged depends on our perception.

In science the notion spin-off is known. With this are summarized the inventions and results which are the derivations of a particular research programme. Through space exploration many inventions have helped the electronic industry and the medical and other sciences. Something similar takes place in the esoteric school. Through bringing our personality in harmony our insight increases. This not only extends to our immediate, personal circumstances, but also has a bearing on much around it. It is the spin-off of mystical labour.

Mystically spoken it is justified to develop ourselves in such a manner that everything that we obtain is the completely natural result of our development and not the condition for it. He who attaches a condition to his development, gets into trouble once the desired things have been gained or when they are taken away from him later. Lodewijk van Deyssel made himself an ideal image of the painter Thijs Maris. But the meeting with this man disappointed him. Van Deyssel's reaction is typical: "My soul had strained itself and could no longer close around the sublime." This may happen to us when we let our development depend too much on factors lying outside us. He who does not let himself be restricted too much by his own ideals, notices that wishes which he has not tried to realize are fulfilled spontaneously. We may safely have something on our list of gifts wanted, as long as we are not the victim, not the slave of those desires. The desires that we have must on the contrary be brought under control and, when they are positive, put into reality.

Suppose that we are nowhere more at home than in the medical sector. When we are predestined to this, still other laws must be fulfilled, like acquiring writing and following the traditional training. Because not all conditions can be met at once, our task is gradually expressed. With every opportunity that appears it will develop further.

The striving after the realization of our ideal must get the opportunity to be fulfilled. This takes time. In the first place we shall have to reach the age where we can have a conception of a medical objective. Also we must have the freedom to make a choice and to attract the means by which we can start a career in the medical field. What we are waiting for, is the coming to an age where it is possible. On the basis of the desire we can make a blueprint and use our willpower to influence the forces of nature. Sometimes through stopping the desires, the desired will spontaneously manifest itself. It goes smoothly, as the result of our natural development. The regularly following of mystical principles makes this work.

13. Beauty

Both at the outer and inner level the higher spheres are reflected in art and science. Inspiration can be seen in many forms of human capability. It may be a book or a painting, a sculpture or a film. It may also be the work of a black smith, a surgeon, a glassblower or a computer designer. Seeing a craftsman at work who is working intently and with love, evokes admiration. While noticing the manifestations around us, we see the hand of the one who created the beautiful.

When we see a building we think of the architect. When we see a painting we think of the painter. When we see a film we think of the scriptwriter. Some film dialogues are mystical in nature and are pervaded with a great insight in the human psyche. We may think that it is only a film. But no film comes into being without its contents having been visualized by human beings. They have a responsible task, because they reach a broad audience. Some filmmakers realize this and try to bring the best that man is capable of in the field of good morals and ethics. They influence millions of spectators positively, for their work shows a grand plea for human warmth and love. This is important for the scriptwriter but also for the spectators. When we look at an inspired work of art we see something of the higher principles in the universe. It is a blessing that many people day in, day out, become acquainted via modern means of communication with high principles, even if these are not always presented as such.

In the world a distinction is made between beautiful and ugly, attractive and unattractive. That there are beautiful and less beautiful things cannot be denied, for we have invented two words for it. It is not so easy to establish what their differences are. It is settled by mutual comparison. Of two things one object may be indicated as the most beautiful. When we add a third object it may surpass the first two objects in beauty. Beauty and ugliness are relative notions. It depends on the observer to what extent he calls something beautiful or ugly.

In an Arabic narrative a man says to his friend: "I think your wife Fatima is not beautiful at all." The other replies: "This may be so, but you have never seen her through my eyes." It took a splendid answer to neutralize such a remark. No doubt we have a notion of what the beauty of a flower is. We can describe the ideal flower without mentioning a flower species. In our opinion it has a healthy, strong stem. The leaves look well-fed and fresh. Of the rest we expect that it strikes the eye as pleasant, that all the leaves are attached to it and that the whole looks healthy and glorious. This however is an enumeration that stems from an abstract image of the ideal flower and it is only valid under certain circumstances.

That there are different ideals of beauty we see when a child proudly approaches us offering us a little flower. A flower which under all other circumstances would be called ugly. The leaves have fallen off for the greater part, the stem has been snapped, the whole looks windswept, but the child that keeps the flower gripped in its little hands shines. This flower brilliantly bears the test with the 'ideal' flower portrayed before. That which seemed ugly is outshone by the affectionate intention of the child.

We do not like what in our opinion is ugly. Everything must be beautiful. We act according to this maxim when we consider human traits. Not in the sense that we hope to learn to appreciate an ugly feature, but because we would like to understand it or to see it disappear and change its expression. The change takes place with ourselves. When we learn to see the beauty of

something, then something has changed in ourselves too, in our perception and awakening and not in the object.

The chief character from the well-known story about the ugly duck evokes feelings of protection. We feel the need to segregate this little duck from its other, ever so beautiful, much too beautiful brothers and sisters. The isolation evoked by ugliness we find pitiful in this case. The isolation on the other hand that appertains to crime in all its frightening ugliness we think pitiful in the least: and so that isolation must stay. With that the notion beauty gets the same function in the social order as the white corpuscle in the human body. The ugly that tries to penetrate and to poison the good must be isolated by beauty to be robbed of its injuriousness.

There is no definite criterion for beauty. There is always something that appeals to the one and is a matter of indifference to the other. The differing opinions about the same phenomena prove the relativity of beauty, for in fact we never discuss the same thing. We always look different at the environment than our fellow men. Everybody realizes the world in his way. In the first place we always compare one thing with the other. Secondly our interpretations differ from those of other people. Thirdly our own perception changes with regard to one and the same phenomenon. It proves how relative value judgements are. Nonetheless we distinguish what surrounds us in terms of beauty. We wish to make an image for ourselves of the beauty of nature and to propagate this image in our material and psychical shape and creative expressions. We often do not see the function of what we call ugly.

The story goes that somebody wanted to demonstrate the scope of this function as follows. He put a painting on an easel and hung a large cloth before it, in which a cut-away was made of ten by ten centimeters. When he asked somebody if he wanted to reproduce what he saw the answer was: "An ugly spot of paint." Thereupon the cloth was taken from the painting. The spot could not be retrieved, as it was embedded in the beautiful whole of the composition of which it was a part. The esoteric schools time after time awaken man to the beauty that so often expresses itself in contrasts. Through mystical tuition the light goes out into the world, where it ends up with searching souls who climb the way to their higher selves.

14. Masters

In mystical parlance one regularly comes across the expression 'master'. This designation is used in four different situations. The notion 'cosmic master' is understood to mean a personality situated at a spiritual level. But not every personality at this level is thus denoted. Mystics reserve the designation 'cosmic master' for a personality who needs not bring his inner self to manifestation through cycles of rebirths and occupies a high place in the order of ranking of soul personalities. Cosmic masters are said to influence the evolution of the world by guiding man and giving him spiritual impulses.

Then there is the expression 'master' in connection with the attaining of a particular educational degree in a mystical brotherhood. This title means a distinction for the person involved. It does not designate a degree of development. Most of the brotherhoods will point out to their members that acquiring the title of master is no criterion for development and progress.

Thirdly the word 'master' indicates the rank of a chairman with a branch of a brotherhood. Sometimes the presiding master is considered the temporary spiritual centre.

The fourth explanation is connected with the attaining of personal progress. Somebody who sufficiently masters the material and psychical aspects of his life is called a master of life. This mastership is what we all try to achieve. It is also the most interesting. He who has achieved such a mastership will assist his fellow pupils to reach the same level. The pupils for their part help the masters, so that these keep continuing and each time reassess what they have achieved.

15. The mystic and death

When we think of the mystic we see activity, endeavour, exertion, light. Death we look at as grief, passivity, darkness. Two apparent contradictions. Yet the mystic and death are very close. The mystic knows that life is a continuous flow. He lives in the earthly and in the spiritual sphere. Material death does not inspire him with dread. Fear lasts through lack of understanding of what death means. To some it speaks the language of darkness, chilliness of the grave, cool tombstones. To some, death on the contrary is the entrance to a glorious light, to life, to profound peace. The mystic does not fear dying, but he does feel sorrow when he loses a dear one. He does not look forward to his own death with misgivings. Life can only be understood well if we know what the difference is between life and death. To catch a glimpse of it changes us. Is it wonder that he who has caught a glimpse of the eternal light does not fear death?

Man tries to change his shape and to be like a flower that unfolds in the sunlight. But the flower does not want to grow if its roots do not stand in the earth. It must absorb the earthly powers with all its roots if it wants to become a perfect, fully-grown flower. The beauty of its shape has its origin in a well-founded and healthy attachment to the earth. Here it must flourish, here delight the eye of man. Is the mystic different than that flower? He desires to grow, to come into bud, to come nearer to the sun. He himself must become the sun, give warmth to others, bring them into blossom.

It is no wonder that now and then he longs for the calm that the taking off of the physical body will give him. Now and then he wishes to fall apart, like every flower. He does not long for death, but does wish to get more insight into the mistakes that he has made, and to understand the trials that he has had to endure uncomprehendingly. Whoever intuits this, whoever knows how it is to die while he lives, is not afraid of death anymore, which he recognizes as the last threshold to the higher self, as the gate to the highest initiation. On the verge of departure man does not always really wish to make the transition, but the mystic, little as he is in need of bidding the earth farewell, fears it not. On the contrary, dying is for him nothing but the abiding in different light.

16. Dreaming and karma

With his consciousness man takes cognizance of what he is and of the fact that he is. We distinguish a subjective and an objective consciousness which is used alternately. As we become more objective, that is: involve the senses of the physical body more, we move away from the subjective sphere, are no longer fully attuned to the inner senses and vice versa. The one time the objective consciousness and the other time the subjective consciousness is standing by. We do not function exclusively on one of both spheres. We will always be occupied with objective observations when we are mainly subjective. And when we think to be completely busy with our outer senses, there will always be something that keeps us occupied in an inner sphere of activity.

The subjective consciousness presents itself in two shapes. The one is related to personal events which are not or no longer present in the objective consciousness. The other is more subtle and surpasses personal things. The mystic continuously tries to keep in touch with this second layer of the subjective consciousness. The objective consciousness dominates the life that we lead during the daytime. During our sleep or when we contemplate and especially when we meditate, we observe at an entirely different level. Via the objective and subjective consciousness we undergo impressions. The more intensive mystical education is, and the longer it continues, the richer become the inner perceptions. When we leave this method of instruction to chance, or support or pursue it in no way, the results are long in coming.

The confrontation between the outer consciousness and the deepest inner self arouses a tension. It is an expression of a struggle for power. As long as we answer the silent voice from within and are in harmony with nature, our existence passes off in a harmonious way. We are not nearly capable at every moment of lending our ear to that voice, although we might very much like to. There are aspects in our nature which are too strong to be put aside. We must learn to live with that, until they are transformed.

We can work in accordance with the will of the cosmos. If we deviate from that, a struggle for the dominion will be battled out between the higher will and the will of the ego. This struggle expresses itself in the karma. Karma is the law that arranges that every cause has an effect. This high principle requires an adaptation of our opinions about justice. Whereas our earthly laws and personal opinions often talk about punishment and reward, the cosmic laws are exclusively thus designed that cause and effect are connected. Complying with the cosmic will create karma too. Karmic experiences are formed by negative and positive intentions which come about consciously and unconsciously. They are experienced at the level of the objective or the subjective consciousness. It matters relatively little to us at what level experiences are lived through, for life is a whole. What we pass through, is under all circumstances passed through by us.

The aura as an active exponent of the soul personality, determines the protection of the body and the personality and is the key with which the cosmic realm can be entered. The high energy field, the aura, is a function of the personality, and determines at what moment the experiences that are meant for us crystallize. At the moment when the effects of a cause have been captured in the personality and through it in the aura, the other laws also remain active. There is an intelligent combined action between the various laws. They do not contradict and do not hamper

each other's functioning. Through this the one carmic impetus manifests itself in the objective sphere, and the other in a subjective sphere. In all cases the becoming aware makes the karma meaningful.

Karma that is not consciously gone through at an objective or subjective level, does not as to its meaning rise above every other random effect of the working of a law of nature. For instance, if we have planted flowers somewhere and then forget all about it, they will flourish all the same. Even if we do not consciously or unconsciously perceive the result of our action, the flowers grow none the worse for it. They just follow the laws of nature activated by our proceeding. Had we observed the coming up of the flowers from day to day, we would have derived pleasure from the autonomous results of our acting. Therefore karma, the relation between cause and effect, gets an extra dimension through our perception.

We are all familiar with karma experienced at an objective level. But karma is also experienced at a subjective level, like during the sleep. Then perceptions appear which we call dreams. In a dream we can act as though we had a body. At other times it looks as if we only register what happens around us, from an unembodied consciousness. In all cases the dream evokes perceptions connected with feeling. We have pleasant dreams, have a nightmare, or dream a neutral dream that has no emotional impact. It looks completely like what we experience during the daytime. There we have situations also that unlock emotions with us, and situations that are indifferent to us. In the dream an event can oppress us to the extent that we become desperate, anxious and panic-stricken. When the objective consciousness sets in and we wake up, the sphere that prevailed during the dream can haunt us for a long time. Physical phenomena like cold sweat and palpitations of the heart may occur.

Karma does not exist of itself but develops itself out of causes and effects, just like life and the laws of nature. It needs a medium. Man is such a medium. He responds to the karma and goes through it. Also in an insignificant situation can karma discharge. The role that karma has, is that of a neutral response to causes and impulses, a matter of physics. It is not necessarily a reaction that a higher intelligence deems important for our development. In the objective consciousness uncounted occasions can occur through which karma is created or discharged, which also happens when we find ourselves at a subjective level. Then the body is passive, but the impulses leading to karma just continue.

It is often argued that when karma does not get through to our objective consciousness, we will deal with it subjectively. It is not clear what this opinion is founded on. If somebody's house is on fire while he is present, he perceives the event objectively. Is he elsewhere in the country however, without the message of the fire having reached him, there is no reason whatsoever to assume that he will realize the fire at a subjective, unconscious, inner level. There is a possibility that he does, but it can not be established in any way.

Now let us have a look at the physical causes which activate karma during the sleep. It is a well-known fact that some people cannot sleep on their back without having a nightmare. The experience gained during a nasty dream is just as real as the one registered with the objective consciousness during the daytime. Only the condition differs that the consciousness is in. During the sleep there must be a stimulus that evokes the dream, activates the karma. In the said example it is the lying on the vertebral column.

If one would put a researcher next to our bed to attach equipment to our body, he could check its physiological activity during the sleep. He would then perceive something of the feelings that we undergo during a dream. We could be in terror while all this time somebody watches over our well-being. That during the dream we are not physically in danger is of no avail to us, for during the sleep our consciousness is not able to draw that conclusion. Only being awakened brings relief.

Repeatedly we find ourselves in such a situation. After having awoken, we know that our perceptions are a result of the consciousness and therefore are experienced as real. The nihilistic philosophers who claim that we do not exist or that our existence is pointless or an illusionary existence, are wrong. Our earthly and our spiritual existence are a reality that from necessity is dependent on the observations that we carry out with our outer and inner senses, and these instruments will always work some way or the other.

Dreams are realities, as are the daily events. The earthly existence compared with the existence in the immaterial regions, is just as important as dreaming compared to being awake. The one is no more real than the other. Dreams differ from perceptions in the waking existence. There is also a difference between the state of wakefulness - the awareness of daily reality - and the spiritual awareness. Many people give preference to only one reality and do not want to know anything about the other spheres, whereas the keys to these spheres can be found by them too. There are many keys, many places where they can be found, many ways to discover them and many results if one knows how to make use of them. He who is prepared for this and with the keys in his possession wants to open the doors to hidden things, will observe that the doors will open for him spontaneously. The ones who are not prepared can do nothing, for there are none so blind as those who will not see, none so deaf as those who will not hear, none so dead as those who will not live, and none so dreaming as those who will not wake up.

17. The beginning

Lately the investigation of planets like Mars and Venus receives a lot of attention. It is interesting to know whether life as we know it has ever had a chance there. How would it be if we would walk around an earth where no living soul could be found? The majestic loneliness of the empty landscape would make an overwhelming impression on our psyche. We can visualize an empty planet in the universe and go there in our mind's eye. We are there with our awareness, as the only living being. What a contrast with our earth, where billions of people and animals are in touch with things, and exchange impressions of the mind. The unknown world is terrifying in its virgin state. The earth is overwhelming in a different way, because so innumerable many things happen and happened there covertly and in public, of a profane and mystical nature, in numerous many known and unknown places and ways. Perhaps there are creative powers in the universe which will ever become active in the inhospitable places, where now only silence rules.

In the long term a flourishing civilization may be situated on the bare plains, with personalities that live just as autonomously as we do. They will, just like us, speak about a classical past from which they have originated and which obscures their true origin. It will take a long time before the first beings will be able to look back in the past. Maybe they will catch a glimpse of the earthly mortals who have just for a minute stood at their cradle. Our life once began on such a planet. The material organism developed and at a certain moment it became the habitat of the soul. Then man was a fact.

The inner being needs an organic vehicle of a specific frequency. Only in this it can reside undisturbed and be a human being. It is difficult to indicate what development an organism must have passed through before we can label it a human being. As a marvellous amalgamation of pulsating, rhythmically functioning organs, circulating fluids, dividing cells, the physical body serves as a vehicle for our inner self. Reacting to warmth, reacting to cold, chemically adapting to changing circumstances, defending itself against attacks on its continuity of operation, this organism is governed by the soul personality. It is a divine instrument. During the period that man walks on the earth, he has left an ineradicably psychical mark on the planet. Not everywhere in the universe organisms will be able to act as a receiver of the human soul personality, but it would be evidence of little vision if we think that soul personalities can only be found on our earth.

18. Loyalty

Love, which is pre-eminently serving, finds a supplement in loyalty. It too presupposes a devotion that is not determined by what the other does, but depends on the urge to serve. Just like love, loyalty can be of a higher nature, if the one who is loyal effaces himself, not characterized by slavishness and not practising idolization or toadyism. Otherwise loyalty would be equal to selfishness. The distinguishing feature of positive loyalty is on the contrary self-sacrifice. It does not restrict its field of action and is not only employed for one human, one idea. It is not exclusively reserved for kindred spirits but goes further. The right kind of loyalty is not discriminating, never loses sight of human dignity and is universal and constructive. He who works on the world and on himself in a positive way, deserves it that we are loyal to him.

Mystics are loyal to their fellow-seekers as long as these are positive. Every contrast of opinion and political colour ceases with the joint striving after inner development. Would we leave it at that and be disloyal in every field of life, breaking oaths, being opportunistic, we would follow the wrong track. Loyalty is important when it is guided by the higher self and by a notion for truth. It drives us to support congenials as much as possible and to encourage them. When we render loyalty we should not expect a reward. The knowledge that we side with those who in good conscience try to organize their lives positively, must be sufficient.

When the evincing of loyalty stays within the proportions that are indicated by the higher self, then we do not lose our identity. Keeping our own personality is extremely important. If we are loyal to the wrong principles or persons, we reinforce the wrong qualities of someone else's personality at our own cost and possibly at the cost of others. Only if we completely remain ourselves can loyalty serve a useful purpose. If loyalty is blindly it has no eye for human weaknesses. He who keeps his eyes half closed does no longer see the shortcomings of his idol. Loyalty is put to the test in an emergency situation. We must remain so level-headed that we can render help to somebody to whom we are dedicated. This is not so easy if first we have put him on a pedestal through which he has become impregnable. Seeing him go through a crisis may be awkward.

Let us consider the other as someone who just like us is on his way. Then we can look after him too if necessary. Objective assistance is no longer possible if we have made our fellow man a projection of our own desires. At the instance that someone in need reaches out his hand to us his aureole fades. Therefore it is good that the authentic mystical schools do not know glorification of someone's personality and do not designate particular members as the personification of their knowledge. If we are blindly loyal we are deceived. It is a prerequisite that we remain level-headed. Loyalty has a useful function if we are not completely bound up in the other.

19. Self-confidence

When somebody is about to carry out a plan, he does not do this without counting on success from the very start. We experience it as senseless to pursue something without having confidence in its positive outcome. Self-confidence is an important condition for the result of our activities. An enterprise undertaken without confidence is doomed to failure from the very start. Confidence has a large effect on the body. We see it when somebody is exposed to danger. When he is full of self-confidence he manages to tap lots of energy. Is this self-confidence lacking, he gets petrified with fright or fear gives wings to his feet.

Chemicals in the body, controlled by the mind, are paralysing or provide increased activity. In the latter case the activity can assume different shapes: for instance taking to flight or adopting a repelling attitude. Is there no impulse for action and is one without self-confidence one can be numbed with fright. The body refuses to adapt to the threatening situation because it gets no inner order to make the adjustment. In its biochemical reaction it shows no defensive power if confidence is missing. When the body complies with a subconscious order to defend itself, it will not always overcome the threatening danger, for that is depending on other factors.

Changing a situation requires confidence in the good outcome. Otherwise such things are best left alone. Likewise it is necessary to give nature time to do its job. Often we want to lend a certain development a hand through interfering with our reason or through intervening. That which is built up slowly, goes through counteraction if we interfere impatiently and have no confidence in the functioning of the laws of nature. Then our concept can no longer materialize at the most opportune moment. The confidence must be strong, which is not easy. It is not easy to have confidence in life, in ourselves, in the other or in the good outcome of certain situations. Sometimes it seems to take a supernatural effort. Even the advice to stop thinking objectively so that the subjective gets the opportunity to utter itself, cannot be followed then.

Stopping the cogwheels of our intellectual capacity means that we already solve a problem for fifty percent. The result may look like a miracle. Although miracles do not run counter to laws of nature they often come unexpected and emphasize the beauty of the cosmic existing order. When the solution to a problem falls in our lap this way, our self-confidence may get a favourable impetus, because we see that extraordinary powers may suddenly become active. Not everything in life goes as planned, but sometimes there are unexpected benefits as the result of an event that originally was disadvantageous. In that, nature shows something of its unfathomable activity. What takes us by surprise often only temporarily has a negative value. Whoever has met with difficulties which later appeared to be blessings, learns to take into account new opportunities.

It is understandable that in a time in which problems arise we can hardly dissociate ourselves from them. They just require too much energy and make us physically passive and tired. Self-confidence disappears. The difficulties in which we find ourselves inevitably from time to time, can be a school. Somebody who is becoming proficient in the mystical art makes many mistakes at the start, but he can be strong in his trials, because they are not life itself. They are its exponents, at the exterior of his personality. In times of resistance flexibility is needed, the being docile without losing our personality.

The Chinese oraclebook I Tjing says about this: "Whoever lets himself be broken inwardly through exhaustion has no success indeed. But in a human who only has himself bent down by it, the distress excites a power to react that in due course certainly comes to light." (Hexagram 47, Repression.) Trial and happiness alternate. It is a wave-like motion that can be smoothed by the will to do good. There is no stronger power to achieve a balance. With good will we master the most difficult thing to master: the objective intellectual capacity. A person who, full of confidence, chooses the way of the good, discovers that he has more difficulty with what he wants to achieve than when he follows the line of least resistance. But what a goodwilling person achieves he keeps and this is a lasting thing.

"Whoever possesses self-confidence will,
as the queen does her swarm of bees,
as a leader lead and control others."

Quintus Horatius Flaccus
(65-8 B.C.)

20. Austerity

In general the changes in society are introduced in a gradual manner. They do not arrest the attention and are the most natural thing in the world before we know what has happened. It is as with places indicated on the map of an atlas with big letters that lie apart and are difficult to detect. Without training our mind is not suited to cover a wide area. A trained mind can gear itself to phenomena that lie wider apart. Two things which apparently have nothing in common are connected by it, as a result of which patterns are discovered and formulated or enigmas unveiled.

In the social processes the changes come about in a large space of time. They are easily overlooked. Such gradual developments are not noticed in the beginning. Too little distance is kept from them to notice them. Therefore the tendency to austerity that can be perceived in many fields becomes a fact before we realize it. In the sphere of designing this influence has been strong. The interior of the homes became more austere. There was a change from voluminous furniture to more abstractive forms and less warm material. For a while cars were made with a less round shape. They got sharper and longer lines when they were put on paper by the draughtsman. The round shapes are now returning.

Maybe designers act under the influence of a group consciousness, although they may think to be influenced by the taste of the consumers or to have spontaneously launched a design of their own. Companies give their trademark a face-lift every so many years to keep up with the times. There are several examples of brands that in the course of the years have shown a clear retrenchment and have become more abstract. Printed letters, baroque in the older days, were stripped of their curly shapes. They were stylized to the extent that sometimes they were only indicated or suggested.

In house-building and office-building stylizing is not the effect of a lack of means, but of the architects' deteriorating notion of the human mind. In architecture austerity has assumed its most tragic shape. It shows a ruthless neglect of the human need for warmth and security. There is nothing against the quest of man for the higher mathematical things, the abstract, the root of things, the symbolical. But by only giving it shape through efficiency one neglects the duality in man.

Abstraction must not be an objective in itself. Turning it round, a mode of expression rich of forms and elements that delight the eye must be coupled by inner wealth. Material things need not be a cover over the inner life and also under a simple cloak wealth may be hidden. I Tjing says on the subject of modesty: "It is the law of the forces of destiny to injure abundance and to grant happiness to what is modest. The people too hate abundance and love what is modest." And: "Inside the earth is a mountain: the image of Modesty. Thus the noble diminishes what is too much and enhances what is too little. He weighs up things and brings them in balance." (Hexagram 15, Modesty.)

21. The child

The human mind changes under the influence of time. This can be told well by the unconscious way in which a child masters the language. Acquiring the native language is enigmatic. The memory must store word, image and sound and enable combinations. Words must be mastered that designate an abstract idea. The child picks up such a word by finding a connection between actions or emotions, and that word. Between dozens of words this one special word may be present that belongs to the situation, the act or the emotion of the moment.

From a sentence that is coherent for adults, the child must manage to infer what it is all about. Then the child must determine what the meaning is of the rest of the words in the sentence. When the mother speaks endearments to her child and treats it accordingly, it notices, that word and deed are not inconsistent. But when the mother uses the same words while behaving differently (for instance she looks quasi angry), the child most of the time can still understand what its mother intends. From factual and nonfactual or even contradictory information it must derive the correct meaning of words and especially sense the intention of the speaker.

Learning the language has to do with a high degree of intuitive sensibility. More so it appears from it that objectively seen the child may be a tabula rasa, but it has a highly developed ability to associate, select, correct and interpret many kinds of information. The child must even learn to handle many kinds of language, for instance general conversations that take place between the parents and a third party while the child is not involved, and language used by the parents to communicate with the child.

There are also language hybrids. The parents do not talk with the little child in the same tone that they use among themselves, but use infant speech. The child realizes that its infancy entails this speech which it accepts as totally normal. This is also realized by the outer consciousness of the child. It observes itself from a distance and then comes to amazing, introspective remarks as: "Yes, but I am just a little child, am I not, mama?" Information spoken in child language is recognized by the child as adapted to its outer age, not to that of its inner self. But if the child can already make this distinction, it no longer needs child language which nevertheless remains keeping its function for a while. Parents and children do not think this problematic in the least. So child language must have effect on the inner self of the child.

The child grows up and gets to the age where in its thinking and behaviour it adopts the habits of the grown-ups. At the same time it loses much of its spontaneity and envelops its inner self. The child grows towards the outside world and slowly loses contact with the other world: the inside world. Something can be done against this development. It requires a specific effort that takes to the surface again all the good of the childlike mind.

The mystic too has come into the world as a child. He tries to organize his life as if he were a child again. The place where this undertaking is given shape is the esoteric school. It has its own children. Under its wings a sublime form of parenthood becomes visible. The members of a mystical fraternity have a parent-child relation with their school. Have they chosen this relation themselves? Who can indicate in advance to what experiences a new association leads? Deeply hidden within us, there is something that makes the decisions that are of vital importance: the higher self. We notice this guiding hand when we set our heart on something. Sometimes it is

replaced by what leads to a better fulfilment of our original desire. It is as if the cosmos waits for the moment that the desired thing can be entrusted to us in an optimum shape.

The mystical student often resembles a child desiring to handle objects with which it can only injure itself. He wants to arrange all sorts of things, even under the pretext of wanting to learn from his own mistakes. Repeatedly the decision is made for him that he is not allowed to do damage that is very difficult to mend. A child is not able to get everything out its parents. With everything they do, they try to prepare the child for its coming life. If it does not want to perish in that life, it will have to learn to keep up its end, very first by learning to obey.

Roger Bacon said: "Although everything is possible, not everything is permissible." Of all things, the child wants to do new things which it has had no opportunity yet to test. Of course it has to learn to get the hang of all kinds of things. The observant parents will agree that the child must be offered that chance. However they do not leave it to its own devices. That would be no true parenthood. The child gets room for development and its own exploration, but, if the parents can help it, without running the risk of coming to grief.

The cosmic too leaves us room, but not all the room we want. We are so accustomed to earthly life, that everything seems to be within our reach. But just as little as children do we know where our boundaries lie. The child cannot possibly grasp what it will be capable of doing at an advanced age. Neither can the adult be considered capable of knowing what it is to be illuminated. With ups and downs and under professional guidance and supervision he must learn to discover his own possibilities.

The esoteric schools fulfil a parental role. They work on the counselling of the mystical student in openness or covertly, and make it their purpose to educate in the broadest sense of the word. Here and there they suggest to the student to introduce minor changes in his life, but only if it serves his development and if this can be verified by himself. The first matter of importance is that he grows up to be a steady and illuminated being. He feels the cooperation of others. The guidance that he tastes on the path makes up for his trials. When he progresses, the influence of his counsellors increases, which becomes noticeable in his mind. He knows that he is not lost and on his own in the world. The certainty that he belongs to two worlds takes possession of him. With this he needs help starting in his very first stages of life, for life is an initiation that begins with birth. A mystery difficult to fathom.

A newly born world citizen grows up in a sheltered world; the environment created by the fostering influences of father and mother. As an initiate the child is placed among a few billion other human beings, the other initiates. The adults possess certain secrets that the child may share in later. When the child is young what does it know about life? What about death? About preceding life cycles? About the love between man and wife? What about war and peace and the impulses through which humanity is governed and guided? Slowly the little world is enlarged, disclosed. The child is going to ask questions and is initiated in life. It gets the answers from people who in its eyes possess much knowledge of things of which it has only a suspicion. Big secrets in the eyes of a child that may not learn to see too quickly, because it will not understand the revealed things when they are not carefully dosed. Regrettably not every child will experience such an education.

Parents can only impart to their offspring what it accepts without prejudice. That is why the maintaining of an open mind remains one of the most important conditions for spiritual growth. It is difficult to be an adult and a child at the same time, but it is not a matter of combining what makes an adult an adult and a child a child. It is a matter of taking the best of both. It is put together to a new being that is able to independently attune on the basis of a number of qualities that the child possesses to a large extent: a bond with the origin of all existence, unconstrained devotion, innocence and pliability. Under all circumstances these qualities proof their importance. Through his quest the initiate is like a child again, full of hope and confidence. Eventually he sets out for spiritual adulthood and for that he needs the childlike mind. Then he holds the keys to capture the higher insights and is assisted by those who preceded him.

The esoteric school challenges the adult to preserve a childlike mind and a childlike heart. The child is impressionable, open-minded. It can still be amazed and rely on something. It is honest and represents love. This is the point of departure for the new world. Humanity will only be grown-up when it returns to its childhood years. The child is not only someone of a certain age group, but also someone who is in the state of mind that we think is very special in a child. Under the pressure of the outside world which thinks that we have to act like grown-ups, the childlike impressionability is quickly lost. But this adulthood has proven to be detrimental for the whole human race. Children are disarming in both senses of the word. They have no need for weapons but need shelter. In that they do not differ from the adults, who in their heart need the same.

"Human, do become like a child
or you will never be at all
where God's children reside
the door is much too small."

Angelus Silesius
(1624-1677)

22. Remembering and forgetting

Every moment of our life the memory plays a part. It is valuable and inexhaustible and protects us. Before we proceed to action the memory gives us chapter and verse as a wise pilot. It tells us what we must do to avoid trouble, or incites us to do something that is efficient or beneficial. The memory keeps us company during our entire life, together with its companion, the intuition. Once or twice we are left alone. Then our mind is blank for a moment. We need not try to get memories back forcedly. If we take the trouble to make an appeal to our memory to get the key to our supply of experiences, this wise adviser comes back after a short while, at the moment that we are already occupied with other activities. Not for one moment of the day can we move well prepared if we are not assisted by the power of co-ordination, the power of reason, understanding, intuition and remembrance. If we want to analyse how often we use our memory we are faced with an impossible task.

The memory determines an important part of all actions. We take a book from the bookcase. We have managed to distinguish this cupboard from the other cupboards in the room through its characteristics that have been laid down in our memory. The book is written in English as we have registered further, for we recognize the characters and know that they belong to the English language. With the book in our hand we walk to a chair, while we manoeuvre around all kinds of pieces of furniture. Our memory tells us in fractions of seconds that we shall knock ourselves if we walk straight ahead.

You see an acquaintance walk on the street who is in deep conversation with somebody else without noticing you. Nothing in his behaviour seems to indicate that something in his mind is connected with you. Nothing reminds the passer-by of you at this moment. Yet somewhere in his busy mind a space is cleared for your data. You call him over the street and in the next second he stops his conversation and turns towards you. He raises his hand which proves that he has flawlessly received impressions about you from all the billions of impressions in his memory locations.

We can endlessly continue looking for examples in which our memory plays a role. If not uncounted images were filed in the memory we could not recognize anybody in daily contact. From the moment that man obtained a memory, which must have been the case very early in history, he began to influence life. His cells show the miraculous working of the memory, and the life processes in the physical being keep running on the basis of this memory, along steady patterns. Owing to fixing in his memory the patterns that he sees around him, man can predict the future to a limited degree. The recurrence of events is recognized in the memory and from there its pattern can be derived through induction and deduction.

The lion's share of the recollections is related to actions that return many times everyday. They are performed in a routine manner without us being aware that our impressions are transformed into useful data for the memory archives. The way perceptions are enciphered for the memory is something special. None of us will be mistaken in his place of residence or get lost in his own neighbourhood. But can we describe the streets that we walk through every day? Much further than a few vague characteristics of the houses we will not get. We will not be able to make a detailed description of the façade and such. We do not mind the details of the streets that we walk through innumerable times absent-minded. They cannot possibly be remembered. Such is

the selective and efficient nature of the memory, that it, without inundating us with useless information, gives so much data that we can find our way back home and yet think about all kinds of things along the way.

Enough information must be stored in the memory; otherwise it cannot find points of departure from which the total picture can be reconstructed. Which points these are cannot be indicated. Anyhow the storing takes place in an effective way. The more peculiar it is that after years the details of a completely insignificant event can still stick in our memory. At the same time the memory has, in addition to the capability of keeping the most impossible or unnecessary things, a construction for selection, a censorship that prevents information that we can do without from coming to the surface.

Our social freedom of movement, for an important part depends on the correct use that we make of our memory. It is put to the test when we run into an unknown situation. Generally we set this off by making use of the means that we have already applied earlier and which stay alive in our memory. When memory and intuition abandon us we are like a ship that has come adrift, but mostly we need not undergo a new situation as ignorant, helpless beings. Our memory archives are filled with all possible solutions for the most divergent problems.

Not all facts are there for the taking. In that case we better let go everything for a moment while we keep ourselves engaged with other matters. We would have a much easier time of it if we could generate or send away memories consciously, but they are independent of our whims and appear unpremeditatedly or only if we patiently ask for it. That thoughts are rebellious is not only proved when we try to obtain an answer from the memory. The reverse also goes. When we carry a memory that we had rather banished to the farthest corners of our memory as quickly as possible, it keeps flitting through our mind while it costs us the greatest difficulty to get rid of it. If only we do not let ourselves be enticed to try that, for the suppressing of memories just gives them the emphasis that they should not get.

Only through relaxation can we free ourselves from that of which we want to be liberated. Only by keeping our patience we shall in the long run control the memory, send it away when we can do without its presence. Sometimes thoughts keep haunting us during our work and our spare time and it may take us years to expel them. In such a case we can seek distraction in order to prevent that which throws us off balance, from getting through to us. It is better to seek seclusion and, in meditation, to forget all earthly bondages. With the passage of time the memory of a certain event fades away, or it becomes less painful. Also when we want to dig up something from our memory, we can withdraw in meditation for a short while. Not seldom the memory will hurry towards us after a while with a packet of yellowed facts. The one time they are collected well-organized, the other only partly readable. Sometimes they are incomplete and sometimes complete but disorderly. It is quite an art to arrange the facts that are at our disposal.

The memory has a special, important and protective function in life and composes our experience. If we would not have that, we would roam without a will of our own and be led from one situation to the other, without the possibility to look back and, with this, to look ahead. The mind is fed by the continuous repetition of data. We best remember what we need most. The memory can be fed with positive things. It is not only there to look back. We can use it as an aid to travel to the dawn that lies ahead of us. Unused achievements must be called up from

the memory and be activated. Our experience must be applied. That gives us newer and better experiences, therefore better memories. Feeding the memory with positive facts increases this development.

23. The infinite source

In the material world much can be seen that seems not to be related. Seemingly some things we perceive are incoherent. Nuclear physics and chemistry however have made us appreciate that the outer world can be reduced to building stones which are the same for all matter. Nature is more monomorphous than we might expect. In everyday life we distinguish between nature and culture. The mystic and the alchemist understand by Nature all known and unknown phenomena of the material and the spiritual worlds. Each have a different look because their elements have a different composition. Nature is not only the beautiful woodland. It consists not only of seas, mountains and fields of flowers. By 'nature' biology understands the world of man, the animal world and the plant world. In mysticism 'Nature' is the cosmos, comprising all products of the universe, therefore also the spiritual worlds.

All phenomena in nature come from one source, but society has become so complicated that mankind has been deprived of the feeling for unity. In his opinion there is talk of nature on the one hand and culture on the other hand. Our mind tries to classify phenomena to get a grip on them. It divides uniformity into parts and only then we get a grip on it. Should our mind work so synthetically that it no longer analyses, it would be unable to pronounce upon reality. That we class reality is understandable. We have a mind and we use it. What we observe we classify.

Even when we live on our own in a shack on the moorland, which after all has become a metaphor for life in its most natural state, we will furnish the space and set up our own vegetable garden. This pure way of living will be divided by the mind in nature and culture. Every furniture that we make as a recluse and the vegetables that we grow, is rated among culture - a classification which says nothing about quality. The culture of the recluse is another than that of the industrialized society, but it remains culture.

Seen our habit to divide and class things, can our mind fathom existence only when it is split up? If we want to get to know the universe should it subdivide itself? Let us contemplate this thought for a moment. As soon as 'existence' has been divided, it consists of at least two parts which exchange energy when they get into contact with each other. As long as the primal energy is only in essence twofold or compound, it is unknowable. As soon as it has divided itself, emanates from its duality what we call the knowable world. It has a visible and invisible, a physical and a spiritual side.

Through the scission in the primal element existence becomes cognizable. This does not have to mean that it is fully approachable. For the great majority of mankind, it primarily seems to consist of the physical sphere. This material reality has not nearly been explored yet. For a smaller group of people the knowable world, in addition to the material world, also consists of the immaterial world. And it is not yet fully known either. The spiritual sphere belongs to the knowable world and is partly accessible to us, as we know from experience. Its aspects are cognizable and recognizable for a mind that can attune to it. Every time that our insight grows, we get more in touch with the physical and the spiritual world.

A contemplation of the world shows how unity became plurality and how plurality creates new unities, which possibly never return to an original source. After all they do not directly originate from it, but from the combinations of unities which themselves were derivatives already. In the

same way also the physical human being is a derivative of a primal source. We experience our human shape as a duality. We become aware that duality can be seen everywhere in nature and try to keep in touch with the unity behind it. Not because we feel torn, but because we do not feel happy with the idea that we are cut off from our source. But unity, if it would be carried through to the essence, leads to the disappearing of all that has been, for in that case everything would return to the state of the undivided origin. The unity that the mystic says to pursue, is therefore a different one: that of harmony with the things that are and always will be.

Has the originally undivided rudimentary element ceased to exist after it has expressed itself in duality, after unity made room for a manifestation in plurality? Or did after the separation the primal principle remain to exist? Such a fountainhead can create eternally and renew nature perpetually. A source on the other hand that does no longer exist after its division and is totally split up, is exhausted. This force behind all forces would have used up its energy to bring about creation. The source would have ceased to exist. Renewals that might come into being afterwards would emanate from the combinations that the already created things would form together.

The conception that man has of the cosmos will make or break these theories. Does the cosmos create things or does it divulge what is present in it; is it dual? According to many mystics both perspectives are true, because they are two appearances of the same phenomenon. Everything is, nothing is created that is not there in rudimentary form. But what exists in rudimentary form does not yet belong to the discernible reality and in this sense must still be created. It is transformed. Its elements get a new shape and that which is already present becomes knowable in a new way.

If we hold on the picture that the cosmos can be an inexhaustible or a finite source, where everything is present in principal and from where everything emanates without it being created as something completely new, we can illustrate it as follows. A piece of rope is composed of two or more threads, which are twisted in such a manner that they apparently form an indivisible, a coherent whole. We can compare the rope with the primal source. Now we break up the rope at one end so that we keep the constituent threads in our hand. When we pull them apart we get long threads which become longer and longer at the cost of the main thread, which becomes shorter and shorter. Ultimately we hold a number of thin cords in our hand and the original thread has disappeared.

This would be the picture of the source that subdivides itself in plus and minus and in visible and invisible worlds. It is finite itself and ceases to exist at the moment that it has been converted into something different. Returning to the metaphor we can also see the rope as an infinite cord. Then there will be no end to the subdividing. This is the other world view, in which the infinite source keeps manifesting itself in polarity, whereas it does not get exhausted as a source.

From the world view of the cosmos that created the world and still exists itself, it cannot be deduced whether the source occupies itself directly with its manifestations. When it continues with manifesting in polarity, at the same moment both the source and a number of its manifestations exist, but the source need not necessarily control the manifestations directly. No controlling influence needs to emanate from the source to one or more of the levels that it has

manifested. The word 'controlling' has a meaning that matches the human level of thinking. It hypothesizes an active involvement with something situated inside or outside us. We can fairly well define such a thing, but the relation between the cosmic source and its creation may be of a totally different order that we cannot understand.

Can it be that the cosmos regroups the existing things without adding something to it, or does it create all things from nothingness, or does it create a certain number of things which form new combinations themselves after that? But, if the universe regroups existing things, where did they come from? If on the other hand the universe really creates things, does it then make 'something' emanate from 'nothing'? If so, there must still be something outside the universe, i.e. outside the ultimate creative power, that can supply the substance or nonsubstance out of which something can be created that is not present in the universe itself. A term like 'the all-embracing cosmos' will then become impossible; the universe would have to be defined anew. But then again there must be concocted another, all-embracing, creative entity. If we know something of existence it is because nature, of which we are a part, and the power that creates or emanates it, are one. Knowledge of the undivided source itself seems to be an inherent impossibility.

24. Cosmic mission fulfilled

Recently somebody lent me the book 'Cosmic Mission Fulfilled', written by the former Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order A.M.O.R.C., Ralph Lewis, the son of the even earlier Emperor Harvey Spencer Lewis. I knew of the existence of this book as long as I am a member of A.M.O.R.C., but had never read it. In some way I felt I had to read it as a tribute to Harvey Lewis, an illustrious man, who has had an enormous influence on the continuation of the Rosicrucian tradition in the western world. I am glad to have read it and can advice everybody to do the same.

I knew that Harvey Lewis had to endure many difficulties. He was attacked from several sides, en besides his exertions to establish above ground in the United States of America and later in Europe the philosophy of the Order - that had gone through a period of underground activity - he had to put much energy in fighting off all kinds of obscure powers which tried to make it impossible for him and the Order to work. But that it was such a heavy assignment as described by his son I could never have thought. A genuine cosmic battle was fought here. Harvey Lewis has demonstrated a steadfastness of character that can also be found in scientific and technical circles (apart from the fact that even in those fields he has accomplished marvellous work).

Lewis' work gradually found expansion, although he was constantly thwarted. So it could have all gone much faster if one of the first members of the Supreme Council, appointed by him, had not run off with the cash; or if the Order had not been suspected and summoned for militant sympathies, merely because in an American harbour a hostile ship had been put under embargo which ship, disastrous as it was, bore the name of 'Emperor', through which unjustly a link was laid between the enemy and A.M.O.R.C.; or if some members from the very beginning had not detached themselves from the Order, and through truths, falsehoods, half truths and distorted truths had not accused A.M.O.R.C. of all the bad things imaginable. The book of mr. Ralph Lewis made clear to me why in those days the office of Emperor was transferred from his father to him as his son. Far from being a small family circle it appears from the whole affair that there was a very clear and acceptable reason for this internal transference of the high office.

There is a whole different side to the life story of Harvey Lewis yet. From it you see that an esoteric school need not necessarily come into being in a very rarefied and mystical manner. Perhaps we find it unimaginable that with establishing such a school people have been involved, with all their being wrong and failing. That idea seems profaning. An esoteric school preferably should be akin an entity descended from the heavens, of which we become a member next. But if we study the life of Harvey Lewis, we see the wrestlings of someone who has set to work with a task almost impossible to carry out, given him by the old Rosicrucians from France. There are personalities of the highest level who have quitted for less. Lewis' task was huge, because it seems that he was assigned to create no less but a new world. He was like a candle burning on two ends at the same time: it has led to his very early death.

In spite of the profane wrestlings in the initial period in America, where everything revolved around lack of money, improvisation, moving from one location to the other, the loss of money, the loss of members, the depression, and lawsuits to ward off antagonists it dawns to

us that behind all these earthly efforts a pattern of cosmic scope can be found. The inspiration permeates all obstructions. With that it accentuates even better the enormous and mysterious connection between the cosmic and the profane world, than otherwise would have been possible had A.M.O.R.C. as an esoteric school always 'just' been present, and people just had had to associate with it. The book gives a good picture of what it is all about with A.M.O.R.C. and what it could mean for somebody. It also makes clear that there are always powers in the world that can inspire us. The construction that Harvey has set up for those powers is now the responsibility of his successors. He was always convinced that torchbearers would continue his work after him. And also in this he was right.

25. Knowing and believing

At the beginning of our study we, as mystical students, learn that we have to temporarily put aside the old view-points that we carry with us. We need not throw overboard everything, nor consider as worthless what we have learned to be of value. We learn which methods mysticism applies, thus to come to knowledge based on experience. For us it is no longer a matter of taking someone's word for what he sees as reality, but of knowing, which comes from within. If we walk that road we learn to understand if what we have learned at home, at school or elsewhere, is based on the right principles. We also learn to distinguish between what is taken beforehand - on someone's word - and what originates from the inner master. An often heard remark of seekers on the path is that they have learned that man cannot know everything, and that therefore he should be satisfied with question marks and accept much things in faith. Just let us analyse this important twofold notion.

The first point supposes that the pupil cannot know everything. He has learned this opinion from others. He has been in contact with people who have imparted knowledge to him and who have told him at the same time that this knowledge is incomplete. Despite this admonition it is not easy for him to remember that the knowledge that he acquires is limited indeed and does not keep the same value under all circumstances. This is a problem for educators of children. Initially the child knows nothing about anything. What the adult knows on the other hand is limited. Every time he imparts some knowledge to the child he should do this with reservation. But he can hardly build in restrictions with every piece of information or wisdom that has to be conveyed. No single notification would then surpass the level of a shot in the dark.

Therefore parents limit themselves to making a general remark now and then about the relativity of the human mental capacity, of the memory and of knowledge. Meanwhile they convey the main part of their knowledge as if it is definite. Therefore their child can do nothing but for the time being accept all the passed knowledge, until it might appear that part of it is not valid or not valid any longer. Children come into the world young and innocent, apart from the experiences that they carry with them from earlier lives and that constitute part of their personality. The first images, drawn on the virgin page in the form of personal care and educational lessons, leave behind a profound impression.

When we grow up, the human urge for certainty causes that we go back to those first lessons time and again. For there is no other testing material with which we can compare our repeatedly renewed impulses and determine what is or is not appropriate for us. Certain is, that our very first confrontations with reality cultivate the tendency to reject or consider with distrust that which is not in line with our earliest impressions, whether the newly gained information is correct or not. We are attached to our oldest impressions. New information, coming from fallible people, is sifted by us by comparing it with information that we get through people who are liable to error too. The extent to which we can openly judge the truth of a new theme depends on our inner illumination.

The impressions from our earliest youth we had to accept as they came to us. With it we had no other choice than the one prescribed by our then consciousness. The first principles we accepted on the basis of good confidence in parents and teachers. Confidence however has an opposite, namely simplicity or artlessness. We have to be watchful against this. What we have learned

from others may be valuable, but we shall never fully understand or trust it if we have not acknowledged it through our own investigation. That man cannot know everything seems to be completely true. Knowledge cannot be limited. It is not something that can be stored in an adjusted portion in a little box. It develops in a dialectical process, as the result of data combined in an ever changing manner.

This need not entice us to the attitude that consequently we know nothing, or that the desire for extension of knowledge is discreditable. The constant search for more knowledge and wisdom helps us to function better. Not all question marks are resolved, but if we think that we must be satisfied with ignorance we follow the counsel of outsiders and not the advice that the higher self may give us.

The second point of the outlook that we quoted at the beginning had to do with belief. The basic assumption that some things just have to be believed cuts off the path to knowledge. In actual practice we must accept many things because we cannot check everything for the truth. Most newspaper reports we shall have to accept from sheer necessity because we cannot verify them all. For establishing what is or is not true this should not be a point of departure. Belief means that our own investigation has not advanced far enough or cannot advance. Investigation must via reason and intuition lead to conclusions and to knowledge and wisdom. Through a temporary lack of information we can come to a stop on the no through road of belief. This road must be abandoned again. Mysticism teaches us that we should not take anything on trust. Knowledge that comes to us from outside is suspect as long as it is not confirmed inwardly. That just as goes for less profane, for mystical teachings. Only the higher self leads the way to authentic knowledge. It is a paradox that the student first must take on trust (believe) that in mysticism this will prove to be the right way.

We know three ways of speaking about reality. We say that we know something, do not know something, or believe in something. When we believe in something and in fact mean to say with it that we do not know and assume that it may be something-or-other, we let in the possibility that reality is different. When we use belief to check the correctness of other people's teachings we use the wrong instrument. Belief is an (un)conditional acceptance of something that we cannot judge on truth (news coverage in the newspaper, theological stands). But belief can never be a valid argument to accept something or repudiate it. Some people mix up belief with knowledge. They insist that they do not believe anything just like that, but claim to experience it from within. When they are right in that, they speak about inner knowledge, which is quite different than simply giving credit to something.

What we call reality can only be checked through research. When we accept the truths of life by taking someone's word for it, we must - when we are consistent - also acknowledge someone else's belief. When there is a difference of opinion, then from it it appears in particular that the truth knows many faces. If we wonder if our belief brings us in conflict with what mysticism teaches, we can consult our higher self. It will tell us if our belief is knowledge. If so, it will bring no estrangement from mysticism. When our belief is nothing but taking on trust what someone says, we must opt for ignorance or knowledge. Therefore it is important to know why we stick to certain points of view, for instance because they have been imparted to us by people whose judgement we value, or because we have no alternative. Through this we shall come to the truth, but ... it will be *óur* truth.

26. Respecting symbols

Symbols may lose their original meaning so that it is no longer recognized after a long time. Their character shifts from a material to a psychical, or from a psychical to a material function. Sometimes they keep their original, psychical or material function whereas its nature may change. The symbol, in which part of the human experience has been filed, has not always a profound meaning. In a drawing, a statue, a myth or a ritual, superficial or everyday feelings may find room, in addition to stronger emotions like dismay, joy or grief. Not only feelings and emotions are expressed in symbols. Also our innermost feelings (psychical and archetypical images) and stronger outer, sensory impulses follow this track. It begins with us becoming aware of them. Then we take them to the surface and capture them in a symbol, so that they have been laid down in a form that we control. A condition is that we find a suitable manner to translate the impressions. Subsequently the symbol is absorbed again in our consciousness through the line of contemplation. With it the cycle of awakening, expression, transformation and reflection has been completed.

The releasing of experiences from our person, the shifting to the outside world (the world of the necessarily symbolical expression) of what we have detected inwardly, is followed by the desire or the necessity to absorb everything in ourselves again, to integrate it and give it a meaningful place in life. But we do not return to our original point of departure. This is because reflection brings insight, and insight branches off into new impulses, which again leads to other symbols. Modern man has not outgrown symbolical, ritual and mythical thinking. Issues that have a deep, symbolical background are dealt with as an everyday matter, because they have become an inveterate part of our culture.

In many situations we take existing symbolical practices into account, unless we are by commonly accepted standards uncivilized, i.e. untraditional humans. For this seems to be a hallmark of civilization that we have a general feeling of certain standards and values, rooting from the past in the mind and being kept up, even if we do not always recognize their source anymore when they appear to us obfuscated. A second hallmark of civilization is the capability to test standards, values and other cultural achievements - like symbols or tales about human history - against their indispensability at a material, spiritual and ethical level. Thus it seems that reality itself, this is the actual facts of the events which reach us from the past, can be subservient to a higher purpose, like the developing of legislation (ethical level), the experiencing of the beauty that lies in reflection (spiritual level), or the eradicating of hunger by developing agricultural science (material level). Reflection alone would restrict us too much and is not the purpose, not any more than the dry study of facts is. Studying the facts forms, together with the insight that we make ourselves familiar with through investigation, weighing and revaluation, a unity. It is the unity of the human mind in its attempt to receive answers to questions that it creates itself.

Is it right to respect a symbol, to spare and defend it, although it has only a certain sentimental value for us? Is it wise to respect something that actually consists of physical elements? To answer this question we must analyse what a symbol is, whether the venerating of it is basically wrong and what the value of a symbol is. It is impossible to imagine life without symbols. They are necessary to bring about communication in even the simplest fields. Chemicals could be called symbols, because they communicate something to their environment. The symbol seems

to be the only way to come to communication. It is used for mathematical purposes and also has nonmathematical forms, because in order to render information also conversation or gestures, words or images are used. There is no real difference between a symbol in the shape of an object, a conversation, a gesture or an act intimating that we try to convey a thought. A drawn object is the reflection of a reality in the mind, and the reflection itself is again a reality. It does not matter whether we draw a chair or a house, a circle or a rose. In all cases the drawn object is a key on the lock of our memory.

At the moment that we see the drawing of a chair we verify if a similar object is already present in our memory. This happens automatically. Our willpower has hardly any influence on it. When indeed something is present in the memory that has some points in common with the depicted chair, we know how to place it. A similar object is meant to sit on, it can be moved and in many cases is made of wood. The drawing represents something that we can encounter in point of fact every moment of the day. Something only exists for us when it has been realized in our mind. Both the chair and the drawing of it are only a reality as soon as we are aware of their reality. The chair of wood that generally we call the one and only, is just as well or just as little a symbol or a reality as the drawing of the chair.

Symbols are used in personal contacts too and there it may lead to understanding or confusion. If we try to contact somebody, we can utter this by being friendly. The other person may draw a wrong conclusion out of it, for friendly behaviour is not of necessity a derivation of our real thoughts. Out of calculation we can give the false impression that we are friendly. Behaviour therefore does not always conform to our thoughts. It represents our inner thinking as it is, or it is its camouflage if we act differently than we are thinking. Friendliness is a symbol with which we want to give the other person a specific impression. But at the outside one cannot see what our real thoughts are. At the same time without symbols we cannot make clear to somebody what we think of him or what impression we want to make. Even if we would be unsparing of words, we still would have to use symbols. It are means from which one can deduce a message.

Thoughts are intangible entities. If we want to impart them to someone else, they must crystallize into understandable symbolism, like a word, a gesture, an image or a work of art, thus in a recognizable shape. Words and gestures are - just like drawings - products or derivations of our consciousness. It happens that communication occurs without a visible symbol and directly goes from mind to mind. We know empathy and the nonverbal contact, and of course there are the phenomena thought transference, second sight, second hearing. In-depth analysis might take us to the conclusion that symbols are used even then. As we have seen, communication takes place via symbols. They give voice to material or psychical truths. Certain forms of symbolism, like the language, we almost no longer recognize as such. Yet even the language is a symbolical equipment. With this we have indicated some aspects of the nature of symbolism. It forms the communication when we associate, or when we make contact with the spiritual world.

Now we come closer to answering the question whether the revering of symbols is justified. Symbolism has an effect on the mind. Both the positive and the negative thrusts itself upon our consciousness via the symbols in which it must express itself. What we respect is interwoven with symbolism. Because symbols are an expression of higher or lower notions, our respect for a symbol is nothing but the respect for an idea. The material and psychical world are known to us in their shapes, i.e. the symbols, in which they are mirrored. An object that we respect

because it symbolizes the highest achievable in man, is the symbol of that ideal. Through that it forms the expression of its likeness on the invisible plane. It is the key to that authentic likeness. A material or mental symbol can be a vehicle to the immediate experiencing of a mental idea. We can tell this by the functioning of the I Tjing, the cabbala, the tarot and the astrology. Respecting a symbol (the vehicle to the immediate experiencing of a spiritual value, the vehicle to the immediate being aware) is injurious when this symbol loses its function as a vehicle through the way it is respected and taken for what it should represent. It then takes the place of the spiritual value or it represents something negative and correspondingly determines our thoughts negatively.

Our human mind may attach any image to another image. It does this by association, and it comes about by the background and upbringing that we have, and the schooling that we have received. Our conscious intention may give direction to those associations. This is a kind of Art that we learn in mysticism. For instance, we may have grown accustomed to the concept that a triangle represents some cosmic laws. This idea enables us to be aware of processes that may be of great help in our lives. The conscious seeking for associations that help us along the mystical path, is a mystical key to enlightenment, and it is of great value. Having said this, it is possible to attach any meaning to the concepts regarding for instance the dragon, or mythical personalities. The point however is, that when we have a simple symbol, we may give it a meaning that originates in ourselves, and is coherent. But if someone else has elaborated on this symbol before us, we may have difficulty in giving our own interpretations to that already elaborated upon idea, because its creator may have narrowed its meaning to such an extent, that we can hardly deviate from it to our liking.

Thanks to us an entity gets a symbolical function. When the symbol is a vehicle of positive values, misuse of it cannot make it powerless. Only those who abuse, lose power. Life has light and dark aspects. The choice is ours to choose the light aspect for a source of inspiration. He who holds a symbol in esteem because it represents the best things known to man, gets into interaction and in harmony with it. He who renders his esteem with words only and shows a conduct directly in contradiction to the positive contents of the symbol, abuses it. Something untrue is then taken to be the real thing, or the real thing is approached as if it were untrue. We can let ourselves be inspired by positive symbols and carry out what belongs to their meaning. Then we do justice to their intention and are in harmony with them.

"Do not confuse the finger
pointing to the moon
with the moon itself."

Moela Nasroeddin

27. Meditation, contemplation, concentration

The visible and invisible aspects of nature are ruled by the so-called law of the triangle. This law is a metaphor for the conclusion that existence has three characteristics: it is the result, the manifestation (1), of the coming together of the active or the creative (2), with the receptive or impressionable (3). These occupy the three points of the triangle. How does the mystic see these forces? The creative force is the strong, dominating energy. The receptive force has a different vibration number and could be called an impressionable energy. The comparison remains relative. It is not a matter of on the one hand a force taking up a dominant position with on the other hand a compliant, accommodating force. It cannot be compared with the way how people adopt an attitude towards each other: on a basis of equality or in an unstable balance of power. The attraction or repulsion of forces in nature has no moral or ethical basis. It is not about human conceptions like equality, but rather about gradations of equal disposition and interdependence.

The creative and receptive have something in common; otherwise they cannot be attracted mutually or complement each other. They are not exclusively creative or receptive. The creative force could be called the impetus. It is limited in its application and in the limitation we find that which normally is reserved for something subordinate. The receptive principle, often considered to be subordinate, is vast, unlimited in its receptibility. Being unrestrained, which belongs to this receptibility, is an aspect also classed among the creative principle. The receptive force is not the negative side of an energy, but the counterpart of a dominating energy.

I Tjing reveals about the apparent vigour of the creative and the apparent weakness of the receptive principle: "The weak is above, the strong below; that is why their forces feel drawn to each other, so that they unite. This brings prosperity". (Hexagram 31, Tension.) The weak is receptive, often considered sub-ordinate to the strong and creative that is pre-dominant. I Tjing however places the weak on top and the strong below. The strong, creative principle submits and readily lets itself be adapted by the receptive principle. Conversely, the weak and receptive is active in the sense that it no longer lets the incoming force escape, and with it it brings about a manifestation. To embody only the receptive principle equals assuming an amiable, acquiescent attitude. Only assuming the creative principle means unsettled activity. In our being, both aspects have been combined. The effort to grow inwardly is expressed in our mind, which can be considered a receiver. Before we become creative we have first transformed ourselves into a receptive force.

The creative and the receptive are very related. Their combined action can be evoked and preserved. Thus our sympathetic nervous system will be open to the inflowing, creative force. That way we have become the receptive principle and express our willingness to be instruments that the creative forces can avail themselves of.

In the symbolical story from the seventeenth century about the Alchemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreuz the main character goes on a pilgrimage, summoned to appear on an important, royal wedding. When he arrives at a three-forked road and wants to repose to reflect on which path he will choose, he is distracted by a raven. This raven tries to rob a pigeon - that was fed by Rosencreuz - of its bread. Rosencreuz runs after the raven and shoos it away, but by doing this he has imperceptibly entered one of the three paths. In his simplicity he has found

himself on the path from where under penalty of death no comeback is possible, as he has been told before. The dilemma which path to choose was taken away from him through his being concentrated on his work. The problem was solved for him because he brought his thoughts to a stop and became empty.

The mystic who tries to penetrate the enigma of the Chemical Wedding is confronted with the profound images of alchemy, the divine Art. If he lives his life fully, he recognizes the processes in himself and also understands why the book in which the event has been recorded happens to miss the vital last pages. In many ways it has been put into words that the final phase of every endeavour must be emptiness. In the bible the book Genesis mentions six days of Creation and a seventh day of rest. When God's energy had been emanated, six days had symbolically past. On the seventh day nothing happened. Here we see, that the law of creating is treated at the highest possible level. The seventh day, the day of rest, equals meditation, following concentration. We know this at first hand from the mystical work. The six days are an ostensibly complete creational event; the elapsing of the seventh, symbolical day, apparently is the inaction. Yet creation is only completed by the combination of six days with a seventh day. Only the combination of concentration and meditation (the letting go, the emptiness) creates a new situation. Therefore meditation is idleness only in a relative sense.

I Tjing says it as follows: "All movements come about in six stages. Then the seventh stage brings the comeback. Thus in the seventh month after the summer solstice (whereupon the year goes downhill) comes the winter solstice; likewise comes sunrise in the seventh double hour after sunset. That is why seven is the number of the immature light and it originates owing to the six - the number of the great darkness - being increased by one. By that the standstill begins to move." (Hexagram 24, Returning.) We can compare this with the actions of a sling-thrower. He spins his sling round many times to speed it up. Then he lets his arm stand in one position while he lets the stone escape. The intended result follows after a while. The spinning of the sling is concentration. Seemingly this work is nullified by the subsequent standstill of the arm. Nonetheless the first action in combination with the second one is necessary to reach the third point: the result, or the crystallization of the preparation.

The preparing for a final stage is already the introduction to its realization. The arrest of the arm is meditation, so here it is also: letting go. The swing equals the creative phase of six days. The holding still of the arm is the seventh day. The impact of the stone on the target is completion, total creation. The acting and the nonacting, in the latter of which a form of acting is reflected, makes nature perfect. In mystical work we achieve our goal through an ever increasing effort. But the clenched power must get an opportunity to express itself. The stationary hand of the sling-thrower is a hint that we must rest after we have worked, so that we may be creative. These things are one. Education leads to growth and development, but not through being continuously active. The further the instruction goes, the more it appears that development is not only effected through mystical lessons, brain activity and mental exertion. At a given moment we experience that they have lifted us up to a certain level and that we have to let them go from then on.

Especially from our working as mystical neophytes it becomes apparent that everything starts with action (the six days) and ends with letting go, abandonment and stillness (the seventh day). Our work is accomplished only then, and we become a circle, able to answer our goal. We start

with a big test of strength, as if we push a halted car. After a difficult initial period the vehicle, which we are, gains momentum. Our inner source of power takes over the propelling and is continually fed by the fuel that has the shape of teaching material. The teachings become less important than their effect, that becomes more and more subtle. Because the mystical creative activity as to its degree of complexity is surpassed by nothing, it is wise that we devote ourselves particularly to the endeavouring and not yet puzzle our head over the purpose that we serve with it. Even if it looks like putting things on their heads.

Emptiness and activity alternate. After exertion follows relaxation. Then everything evaporates. An opportune moment to live through this, is at dead of the night. When we listen we feel the emptiness, the silence. It is pitch-dark. The day before, a tempestuous world was in motion that has now been covered up by the liberating veil of sleep. Tomorrow it will be just the same. The whole earth seems to meditate. Departed are the worries and wrestlings that keep us busy so much during the daytime. At that moment of silence they seem unreal. Maybe we hear our heart or a very subtle tone in our ears. We are quiet and listen, for at that moment we keep vigil among the sleeping. We experience peace. The memory of former days returns and for one moment we are a child again.

From many sources we know that silence and emptiness come before realization. Almost all Creation narratives talk of a time in which the void was all that existed. Emptiness is also meditation. A faultless emptiness in the person is the preparation for the reception of inspiration and peace. A fair notion of the usefulness of emptiness with mystical work is elementary. Commonly a discussion of meditation begins with the teaching of breathing exercises, the imparting of the right posture and pointing out the necessary emptiness. It is the introduction to the purpose of meditation: learning to know the self. Then in succession are treated the qualities of the physical body, the meditation technique (of which achieving emptiness is a part) and the purpose of the meditation.

About the most important element of the technique, emptiness, we generally hear no more than that it is vital for attaining the right attunement. What it is to achieve emptiness, to what extent one must or can be empty, often does not come into its own. Hence that it is useful to look at the effect that emptiness has on our activities. If it is clear what emptiness is, we know which part of our being gets empty. Emptiness, thus it is commonly explained, points to the lacking of something. Yet it does not exist in this sense. A spot in nature can be empty, but this does not yet mean that there is 'nothingness'. The nothingness has no autonomous existence, it is not even the nonexistence. Then what is emptiness? Must we create emptiness, realize it or imagine it? We can bring our mind in a state in which it experiences nothing but emptiness. This does not say that emptiness is current, has existence. Neither are we supposed to realize complete emptiness in the mind, for if we want this emptiness to be so complete that we are shielded from everything, we cannot let in thoughts of a higher order either.

Our capacity to realize a certain emptiness is limited, but if normal impressions are effaced from the mind, it can absorb the impressions of a higher calibre. That is the meaning of meditation. We shall not want to be totally empty, but we do want to arrest the impressions that stand our realization of the highest mystical truths in the way. We dispose of practically all impressions that we know, so that it looks as if we are empty, but we are only empty of that from which we can humanly extricate ourselves. He who would achieve total emptiness would cease to exist. In

the passive and in the active, in meditation and in concentration, emptiness is of vital importance; the emptiness as we manage to realize it.

We try to project ourselves in a nonexistence and create the impression of emptiness as an aid. We have a tendency however to be afraid of emptying our mind. When we part with all impressions we lose control over our life, at least that is what we think. We expect to end up in a nothingness where we no longer have an identity, no ports of refuge and where we cannot make an appeal to our experience of life. To put it shortly, as strangers we expect to land in a place where everybody can manage except us. We do not want to let go any of our surenesses. When we reside in emptiness, exclusively with our inner self, we are deprived of everything. And that frightens us. We have no clothes, no food, no accommodation, no companions, no knowledge, no money, no body. What remains us but emptiness?

Yet even during sleep we lose the realization of many qualities and possessions. Possessing something without knowing it, without having a realization of it, leaves us unperturbed, and also if something lacks us without us noticing it, it leaves us unmoved. Why then should we be angst-ridden to attain a state of mind in which we do not for a second ponder over what we are possessing or lacking? In the evening, when going to bed, the fact that during the night we lose every notion of our material and other possessions is not going to come between us and our sleep. Our mind gets empty of the things we possess and yet we do not mind.

Letting go, bringing emptiness in our mind, delivers us from possession and loss, from joy and grief. It lets us reside in the eternal Existence, peaceful and in deep rest. When we are released as perfectly as possible from everything that binds us, then in this apparent emptiness a ray of light comes that fills everything. That is why we are no longer empty. Nothing is left which is not the light. On the way to attaining emptiness we gradually discard all excess baggage. There is relaxation and at that moment nobody expects any effort from us. We only have to be, in a mild silence. There are no obligations. The residing in the light, while one has left everything behind, asks for abandonment, passivity, self-confidence and confidence in the higher self. While everything stands still, we are instructed in the higher principles, but also during intensive labour abandonment is possible and emptiness achievable.

Music is a good help with meditation, contemplation and concentration. On the face of it it does not seem wise to use music with these forms of mental activity, because with meditation we must be empty. Nothing from the outside world may get through to the mind. With contemplation we envisage a subject from all sides and music only seems to be able to distract. During concentration one thing is in the focus. The attention may not deviate. Music can be supportive nevertheless. It can make us accessible to psychical impressions. It is an aid that through the opened observation channels of the body reaches our inner self and sets it in motion. With meditation it simplifies the transition from the active consciousness to complete emptiness. Soft, tranquillizing music ushers us into the stillness, until we no longer notice anything of our surroundings, not even the music. With contemplation it creates a peaceful environment that frees our observation from prejudices or an impatient approach. With concentration, calm or stimulating, active music is possible, for both can give strength and may support the vitalizing of the body or the creative labour.

Classical and nonclassical music consist of sound vibrations that have an effect on the psychical

self. In their appropriate form they can be useful. Music is healthy as long as it is harmonious and not so loud that our ears hurt and that we are annoyed by it. Sounds affect the body as if it is touched by a magic rod. They touch the organs, the tissue, the mind and the subconscious, and are medicinal or work in opposite directions. When the essence is not objectively perceived, a reaction is evoked in the subconscious.

It is remarkable that we can translate this into feelings. Thoughts, emotions and feelings are a response to vibrations and subjected to laws of vibration. The indispensable effect of music is founded on the influence of sound vibrations on the mind. There are successions of sounds that have a noticeable emotional effect. They are generally noted for their dramatic, moving, depressing, annoying, or cheerful, cheering effect. Music theory cannot explain this. Are specific emotions in a cosmic perspective inherent in specific sounds? We know that sound is important and that it can influence matter and mind. Sound that is used well is as a healthy food for our material and mental system.

Meditation, contemplation and concentration grant us the necessary ingredients to develop our consciousness. But the work is not completed with that. More is required than a technique that activates our perceptivity. Our psychical self is not satisfied with trained powers of observation. It wants to see something with it. Mystical life is not completed when we have awakened the powers of observation. From somebody who is blind and who gets back his sight after an eye operation, we do not expect that he can see if we lock him up in a dark room from then on. His perceptivity has been restored, so we must give him something to see. It is useless to our physical body when it is continually fed to make all the senses function well, if afterwards it is wrapped up and supplied with a blindfold so that it can perceive nothing. Food is of no use when after being fed the body gets no impulses to develop activities. This also goes for the psychical body and for mystical training. It is of no use to us if we are trained to be able to observe, when afterwards there is nothing to observe. It is no good to our inner self. It must have something to do. When impulses are sent towards us we must be able to do something with it.

Our world is full of opportunities to give a psychical consciousness the sphere of action that it needs once it has awakened. And when we have consumed the right food, we can become active. This food comes to us in the form of meditation, contemplation and concentration. The required energy is generated via forces of nature and guided by the human mind. The clustering of elementary forces brings about a certain creation. This clustering is concentration. Maybe we think that we only need it to obtain something, whereas it is also necessary to make inside changes with it. Our life could show mastership - the power to bring about through concentration things that we really need. But, as we have already said, meditation and contemplation too are important instruments. Because these notions become a lot more accessible for our comprehension when we connect them with an example, we shall now shortly explain them in that way.

A well-known theme used for statues illustrates in an appealing manner what concentration is. It is the theme of the knight on horseback who kills a dragon at his feet. An old allegorical portrayal of the struggle between the good and the evil impulses. The knight carries a shield, which could be an appropriate symbol for the esoteric school. It is the place where we are trained for the fight against the lower elements in our character. When we try to intuit what goes through the knight on horseback we also understand what principle he embodies. At the

moment that he must intervene, his exertion is at its highest. With tensed muscles and in utmost concentration he gives a definite turn to the fight. It is kill or cure. Concentration is effort, combining of forces, which in its most perfect outline can be seen with this active knight.

A completely different effect has the statue of a knight with bared head who leans on the hilt of his sword, very relaxed and contemplative. In nothing he resembles the knight that we have just looked at. And yet, if he wore his helmet he might appear to be the slayer of the dragon. It looks as if his struggle is over or that it still has to begin. Dreamily he gazes into the distance and is reflecting so motionless, that birds dare to land on his shoulders. What is the difference between the active and the passive knight? They use their energy differently. The one time it is combined, the other employed in some other way. Contemplation comes before concentration and when the job has been done reflection comes again. Before the action, reflection is needed to weigh the pros and cons. Afterwards to assess the result. Contemplation gives insight into the aspects of a proposed or accomplished operation. Both with concentration and contemplation there is conscious activity, although with concentration it is of a different nature.

And then we have meditation. As it fits the subject we shall not spend too many words on this. Where words stop, where the explanation falters, where time stands still, there is meditation. Meditation connects concentration with contemplation and these three can alternate in every possible combination. Gustave Doré made an illustration for the Divine Comedy of Dante, of the realm of the angels in concentric circles. Two silent shapes are on the foreground of the tableau, seen from the back. Dante with his conductor Vergil. Two souls in exaltation for the ineffable. There is meditation.

Meditation, contemplation and concentration are different phases of one and the same consciousness and all have their own bearing. If there is an aspect in our life that we want to improve or change, it is necessary to have a focus for our thoughts and to know what we want. Thereupon we try to convert the concept into a creation. The mental energy that we can avail ourselves of is generated through concentration. Hereafter the energy is aimed, we adjust the effect of the laws of nature. With this some mystics invoke the cosmic or address the forces of nature as they would address human personalities. Let us have a closer look at this proceeding.

The said mystics aim at the effect of the laws of nature while seeing them as personified forces. On the one hand when carrying out their mystical work they pose as supplicants who invoke the higher spheres with the request for realization of their psychical creations. On the other hand they carry out the concentration over and over again. Although they consider the cosmos to be an impersonal entity, it is more or less personified by them at those moments, but if they want to call for the aid of an actually impersonal force in a way that fits in with the nature of that force, it can only be done by activating and directing it, not by addressing it as if it were a human being. Although it is difficult for our human consciousness to contact an impersonal sphere without visualizing it as if it has a human mind and human ears to be informed of our supplications, the appeals imply that the forces of nature are invoked as if they are personalities.

When this action is not well analysed, a contradiction may escape us. For on the one hand some mystics consider the cosmos to be intelligent and accessible for their supplications; on the other hand they keep repeating their requests, as if they did fall on deaf ears. An issue connected with this but seldom discussed, is why and how often energy must be applied to compensate the

leaking away of earlier used energy. If all energy would be appropriately employed and would produce an immediate effect, a once-only action ought to be sufficient. Some mystics take it that the employment of mental energy leads to a gradual realization, as if a house is built with which stone by stone must be put in its place. This is very plausible.

If we do not personalize the cosmic we can proceed by attuning ourselves. Thus we discover whether the inner self and the higher self resist our attempts to realize a desired goal. Concentration, which puts creative forces into deploy and is accompanied by exertion, must be concluded with the soothing powers of meditation. Alternately this activity and the mentally letting go of the made concept are repeated until the goal has been achieved. One thought we keep in the focus of the mind, while everything around it disappears in a misty nonexistence. The secret lies in the alternately being active and letting go. Stillness is in the beginning (meditation). Then come considering and strategy (contemplation), followed by acting, the combining of powers of the mind (concentration). The process is concluded by letting everything go (meditation), because the endeavour finds its pinnacle through either nor neither, wanting or not-wanting something.

The active part of concentration labour requires an emotional involvement with the goal. The passivity which at the same time is necessary, also requires an emotional relationship. No matter how discrepant this may sound: we need to actively imagine ourselves in the deep stillness that is achieved when the purpose has once become reality. There must be a balance between exertion and relaxation, but always preceded by and concluded with creating emptiness in ourselves, as if we would possess nothing. In other words, after we have participated actively we have to pose as a passive onlooker. While we remain emotionally involved with the created image, we have to be composure personified. While everything induces nature to bring about the desired thing, there is the perfect peace of inner serenity. When these two things do not go hand in hand there will be no result.

At several moments in our life we concentrate on the calling into existence a mental image. The time of waiting for results gives disquiet. The time of receiving gives peace. But every new condition is also the starting point for a future change. The stillness that falls to us when our wishes come true often fades away again. Then we start worrying about the preservation of what we got. If these are material things the laws of nature continue working imperturbably in their own way, and everything returns to dust with the lapse of time. The achievements that are not tangible, like bonds of friendship, will also end some day, in our expectation of any possible continuation in the future. The material life of those whom we love must come to an end.

The things we try to achieve for unselfish, higher purposes seem to have the longest duration of life, and these exertions may have a beneficial effect even after many generations. Through contemplating these aims we shall discover what makes concentrating useful. During the combining of forces we can try to imagine ourselves in the quiet that comes into being after result has been achieved. This step aims at making contact between three elements and at having them melded: the creative force; the effort required to guide this force; and the quiet that originates after the goal has been achieved. Thus a visualization comes into being in which the present and the future no longer differ.

When we turn our awareness towards our higher self, we want to do this without being

distracted by all kinds of affairs that are connected with awareness itself and that are not significant for us at that moment. To be attuned we must be selective. To reach the higher self we dispose of all unimportant things step by step, by slowly switching from one thought to the next, and not moving on before we have really lived through everything. Afterwards we visualize what our mind will go through after the desired thing has been established. In this work an attitude of relaxation is needed, that also must be summoned during our daily work. The mind must change in such a manner that we permanently imagine ourselves in what we want to be. During concentration we become one with the subject of our attention.

Through our mental effort we get in the right direction bit by bit. The goal is sometimes reached rather abruptly, and not slowly appearing in stages to give us time to get used to it. But for the most part manifestations need an incubation period. Once it has elapsed they suddenly crystallize out. The result often differs from what we foresaw. We make a concept, start working, and expect to reach our goal in a manner that has been fixed beforehand. We have to, because when we do not make an image on the mental painting canvas of what we want to achieve, nothing is brought out well. Yet the result will at the very most approach the draft we made. With our perception we make an expectation of the future as best as we can. Reality, that what has been realized, will look different though.

It is not a bad idea to keep the final image of our endeavour as summarily as possible, making rough blueprints of plans, and establishing the goal in broad outlines. Then we set to work and try to forget what result we have planned. Thus we arrive at our goal along the line of least resistance. The realization of our wishes can be effected in the most amazing and unexpected ways. We get what we want but different than what we had in mind. On account of only seeing two things: the beginning of our creative activity and the final result, without perceiving anything of the alchemical process in the incubation period of our wishes, we can hardly recognize how a result could originate that fits in so well with our desires.

A detailed visualization can be made of the methods and the preparations that must lead to the goal, whereas the goal itself is visualized as summarily as possible. Concentrating on the details of the result is possible, but if the concentration is repeated a few times afterwards, it is unavoidable that variances from earlier details arise. For the mystic, who is geared to practical results, finding the right technique to achieve something is a study in itself.

"The wise no longer dies
as this is his sainted lot:
that he died a long time ago
of everything that is not-God."

Angelus Silesius

28. Travellers

When we have made the decision to walk the mystical path, it is as if from the left and from the right things are handed to us which are indispensable for our journey. All that we get: clothes, food, shelter, money, has instrumental value. Much as we may enjoy them, they remain a means. He who sees them as a goal is like the traveller who stands still to have a chat along the road and because of that does not reach his goal. Through what nature offers us, we can fulfil the task for which we are called. Cultural achievements also, are instrumental to this goal.

We are travellers who each time reside in another inn. Our body resembles the inn in which the traveller, the soul personality, lodges. The body is not the goal and neither does the traveller consider the inn to be his goal, no matter how nice it is to reside there. We cannot leave out sections of the road and must follow a particular route of which we do or do not deviate. This entails that we require all kinds of travel requisites, all kinds of luggage to be able to make the journey. Without this excess baggage we do not make it, but when the circumstances only just allow it, we throw away along the road what can be missed. That which makes travelling easy we keep with us. We throw away what makes proceeding harder. What has been thrown away, is proved to have less lustre than we thought. We do not throw away everything. Sometimes we even buy something along the way. When it no longer pleases us further on our journey we throw it away yet, or we make a present of it to a passer-by who can make a better use of it.

In our lives we see many beautiful things. Some are worth obtaining because they make our journey more easy. Other things are as excess baggage that gets heavier and heavier the longer we have to drag it about. All that we have, no matter what, is only a guarantee that we can again traverse a little section of the road. The travelling we have to do ourselves. The 'supply companies' can at most provide us with the necessary things. As experienced travellers we now and then discover that we lack something. Our followers will observe the same. Then we do not travel any farther for a moment, but let others share in the benefits of our travel experience by knocking together a signpost for them along the road. To our followers it points out a halting-place that can be of use to them.

29. Equilibrium

The pursuit of positive thoughts and deeds requires some structure and a methodical approach. We, who have made the choice to attune to the higher self, have a triad of touchstones at our disposal. We can think and act positively or avoid negative thinking and acting, or combine both methods. Positive thinking and acting works, but does not offer a solution in all cases where we want to change things. The solely avoiding of negative influences is not to be recommended. The combination of different strategies gives a better chance for success because of its duality.

The constant avoiding of negative thoughts and actions has something of a negative touch. It is not pleasant to be on the run for the wrong thing, to assume a defensive attitude, to be passive. Avoiding the negative is no fruitful approach. We avoid the confrontation but it does not help us along. Maybe it has a positive side, namely that through it we remain in a state of equilibrium. But should we really be satisfied with such a rigid situation? What positive things have we mobilized? As long as the forces of the good are lacking, the active negative forces have free play.

What is their relation towards the positive forces: are they in balance? That depends on the definition that we give to the word balance. A glass with a contents of a hundred marbles can be filled up to the brim, so that the potential storage capacity is fully utilized. We can fill the glass with fifty red and fifty blue marbles which together form a stable whole. We can also fill it with twenty red and eighty blue marbles and yet keep the self-contained unit. This is because harmony - the full glass - is not dependent on the colour of the marbles, but on the place that both kinds occupy in the whole. If we look in a different way to the purpose for which the glass is intended, the result can be different.

When we work for light, the balance goes down on the positive side. There is never an actual stationary equilibrium in nature. Equilibrium is the theoretically ideal condition that nature pursues, but it only approaches it, via the balance of the separate parts. Between it differences and fluctuations exist, because the parts influence each other. so that they keep being attracted mutually. The separate elements must be in balance before the whole is in harmony. We cannot confine ourselves to bringing harmony in our personal life as long as everything outside us is not in order. When we are in balance we try to create more harmony and equilibrium in the world. This requires a positively oriented endeavour.

Our work is never completed. All the time a new task loomes up on the horizon. The negative forces in the shape of personal adversaries, lack of interest or the loss of enthousiasm keep lying in ambush and gain the upperhand if we chuck it in. In cosmic perspective one could speak of the evil forces against the good ones. Evil is the negative pole of the good, but on the other hand it is sometimes an active, independently existing force, guided by a self-awareness. The good will be able to oust the evil by simply remaining itself and attuning to the higher self. The negative often presents itself under the veil of goodness, because only a few people comply with evil if it declares its intentions in broad daylight. Its deceitful appearance, the sheep's clothing of goodness in which it may wrap itself, blinds many.

He who is neutral does not notice anything of good or evil. As we behave more positively the counterpressure of the negative becomes bigger. It can assume the shape of a personified attack

from the surroundings. Then finding an equilibrium seems to be a necessity to be able to survive. When the equilibrium is disturbed above a certain limit the physical body dies. The personal boundary of balance can be moved to a great extent. There may be great desperation but we remain the centre of our experiences because they are always related to us. It is hard to find a condition in which we do not deal with our problems. Even becoming mentally ill is a way for the mind to deal with the unbearable or incomprehensible. Also death, following a war of attrition aimed against the body or the mind, is an adaptation to the circumstances. The consciousness of the soul personality remains. For someone who dies, the dealing with the peculiarities of the earthly plane is no longer topical. It is continued at a higher level or brought to a halt. The circumstances that pegged the earthly being down do no longer affect him.

When our labour is positively aimed the opponents make their presence felt. Hence that they who walk the path are distracted by all kinds of negative things. A neutral condition is vulnerable. A nudge to the left and we fall into the negative. A nudge to the right and we do the positive. The ideal conduct consists of two components, of the simultaneously avoiding of negative purposes and the pursuing of positive ones. In stead of blaming ourselves about the mistakes that we make, we can lay the emphasis on our well-intentioned endeavour to do something positive.

There is a freedom of choice between two roads. Repeatedly we approach a crossroad with a road to the left and to the right. The conscience is our guide. He who chooses the positive way is in the receiving end of a severe attack from the other side. It can present itself in many shapes. Doubt can come over us: is our way the right one? The doubt is supported by self-deceit, for the temptation is strong to find an excuse for choosing a wrong path. Exercise brings us to the point where this false guide pales before the ardour of our inner light. Then we are no longer hampered and kept from our purpose. Working on the positive side, even if it still requires improvement, is of more use than fighting the negative. The result of both methods might be equal but the positive method is more effective, more pleasant and more humane.

30. The evolution of ideals

He who could take a look in our heart, the heart of the candidate mystic that is, would find in it a motley collection of motives with which we seek entrance to the gates of the secret life. We share with others the wish to investigate nature, but how we want to go about it, is coloured by whom we are, how we think, and how our ideals look. An optimistic view on the world leads to a completely different approach than when only the cheerless experiences of mankind are taken to serve as a model. In the motive to investigate there is, besides a dose of willingness to learn and to be helpful, also another indispensable dynamic force, namely the hope and the confidence that progress is possible, if only someone can be found who wants to direct that desire. We can have a grand concept of how the world should look according to our taste, and in practice really keep to the principles that enable such a world. But we need help.

Having an ideal is one thing, converting it into visible results is another matter. To do so, we also need a consciousness. It can be practised in the shaping of an ideal, and undertake the realization. In principle every mind that is capable of imagining something, is gifted with the ability of transforming it into a creation. The immaterial image puts energy into effect. This enters the perceivable world from the immaterial world. It is not an actual entrance, but for our purpose the comparison will suffice. The concept crystallizes. The relation between the immaterial and material sphere is always there. We intuit that there is a subconscious mainspring. Therefore we keep going, even if an immediate employment for our study results can not yet be thought up.

Mystical education enables us to tap an inner reservoir and from there we must calmly go in search for a useful employment for the forces that we have awoken from their sleep. The energy that manifests itself we can use to prepare ourselves well, through which we can help our fellow seekers to transform their purposes into reality. The effort that we want to put in though, is not meant in the first place for others. We must first be trained to be good instruments ourselves and set our house in order. We ask for guidance and education, and are prepared to provide something in exchange, like perseverance, attention to the study and the rendering of moral support to others. The giving and taking keep pace. The more we dedicate ourselves, the bigger the value that we derive from our study. With us there is a big variety of motives to begin with it. The leitmotiv that runs through it is the preparedness and the desire to understand more of our feelings and emotions, for they are the direct reactions to what occurs in our environment and in our mind.

The moment that we better learn to understand our personality an adaptation of our motives takes place, which functions as a springboard to jump to a desired height. An inspired consciousness will try to realize its ideals in the best possible way. The working on an ideal does not always come into being from an act of the will. When we are empty - even though it is only for a short while - and receptive to the cosmic intelligence, little doors open in our mind and we look through the opening. Then we are filled with an image. Images would be enough for us were it not that as physical human beings we are only perfectly happy if we manage to observe those images both physically and psychically. Because we are gifted with natural powers we can give purposes and ideals a tangible appearance.

We would expect to start with a particular motive that remains constant while our life develops itself further. In actual practice the motives which in the beginning help us get started, are

subject to growth while we advance on the mystical path. Who can suspect at the beginning to what places his mystical journey will take him? Our initial motives are still near the old condition that we want to leave behind. Continuously we adapt these motives. The mind gets a wider perspective, and to it the motives are attuned. In the learning period the notion awakens that we possess hidden capabilities. We want to learn how to use them. The conviction that we can achieve something with it, is confirmed if need arises. Then it turns out that we have more to offer than we considered possible.

On our soul personality the plenitude of the cosmos holds an attraction, which in a balanced human being initially becomes perceptible as religious notion, sense of romance, the inclination to the good, the urge to investigate, aesthetic sense, and love. New thoughts enter our mind incessantly. When the voice on the inside becomes so strong that our physical being can no longer be satisfied with material achievements, the moment has come that we are going to look for what exceeds a simple satisfaction for our senses. The mystical aspirations do not come at that very instant but in a later stage. And once they are there, the development booms.

Somebody who is about to follow a mystical way of life brings out that he wants to give his life a new meaning. There is an irresistible urge that leads our physical being to the gates of mysticism at the right time. Having arrived there, we try to find out if the supplied means are suited to make headway with them. If not, we apparently have gone too fast and take a step down or we look for a different way. A stable and lasting growth must be carefully built. When all personal powers have been mobilized we are capable of dealing with the influences of the outside world and have a better opportunity to render help to other people.

Most motives with which we once started, have undergone a change. Something of which we previously thought that we had to pursue it and could not do without, may have become insignificant afterwards or have lost some of its urgency. There is a right time for everything. Our motives are refined. An intriguing phenomenon, that fits well in the concept of man as an evolving being. In the esoteric schools it is disseminated from times immemorial that this evolution implies a moral obligation. This is necessary to bring the students at a certain level. They learn to handle an ever higher moral standard and therefore also learn to uplift their motives, which has an effect on their personality and benefits the world.

In the mean time the development in the outside world has not stagnated, although it differs from that in the esoteric school. Should no progress take place in the world, it would become more and more difficult with the passing of the centuries to participate in a mystical organization in which evolution did take place. Too big a gulf would arise between the level of the average man and the level of the ever progressing esoteric school. The developments in the world continue however, so that the mystical student can maintain the striving after his ideals, with the prospect that eventually they will catch on in society. Through that the stimulus to go on working is not lost and the impulse to strive after an ideal is preserved. If we put our heart and soul into what is worth the special attention belonging to the good and beautiful, we become in the mystical sense an inextricable part of it.

If our efforts do not immediately lead to a visible result we need not be discouraged. Developments have an incubation period. When we achieve the goal that was set, we immediately find a new ideal on our path. There is no limitation to what we can aim at, although the desired cannot

always be accomplished. But let us pursue higher values than the earthly gain. They are much bigger valuables than all our earthly possessions. They are even of more importance than everything controlled by earthly rulers. So it seems to be an immodest undertaking that we want to take possession of those higher values, but the desire for treasures is not of necessity pernicious or immodest. And if our ideals are only partly realized it still means personal progress.

31. The laws of nature

Philosophers argument with each other for centuries about the question whether man is free. This question is closely related to the way they look at the laws of nature. The one person understands by freedom that he is committed to nothing and in his opinion this is real life. The other puts forward that the absence of rules or regulating mechanisms does not set us free at all, because a world with nothing to go would mean chaos. And he who finds himself in chaos is terrified, because there is nothing he can rely on. Fright makes man unfree.

Although the world sometimes resembles chaos, it is subjected to many laws. What will happen if these stop working? The magnetism that keeps our body together would stop functioning, as a result of which we would fall apart into dust. Sound waves would no longer be transmitted, so we would become inaudible. Words would no longer leave our mouth. In stead of being tied up by the gravitation that keeps everything on earth in its place, objects would stay in their place the one time, and the other time would float into space. They would reach out of our control. What would happen if the psychic nature of man would break from its moorings? Someone with a good character might become so unstable that he might change into a malicious creature. But one day later he might have taken a turn for the better, or perhaps have become totally apathetic.

In a world where nothing answers to rules anymore our life is in immediate danger. If there is no rule and order in the universe, nobody can possibly maintain his position. It is no freedom to live without the rules which make man who he is and which make the cosmos the cosmos. That we are able to give direction to those rules makes us relatively free humans. What we cannot do is changing the rules. Freedom consists of knowledge of the laws of nature, and of the ability to use them in such a way that we can create something that would not have come into being without our interference. Man therefore has a part in the extension of shapes. Laws of nature form matter, with its specific qualities. We finally make more complex structures with this matter.

A law of nature has no structure in the real sense. The human intellect classifies a number of phenomena and calls them 'law of nature'. These phenomena are expressed in a formula that explains or captures their functioning. Formulas classify and rubricate the isolated manifestations of nature. They are derivations. By means of the formulas we look at the outside of the laws of nature. Formulas describe the phenomena without being able to tell exactly what they are or what their cause is. With a formula we look at the outer manifestation, at the form of the law of nature. A symbol connected by us to a law of nature, will tell no more of that law than that it exists and that we can follow its working.

Science distinguishes several laws of nature. In theory they can all be described separately, but although such descriptions chart special phenomena of nature this does not mean that nature itself is fragmented. The law of nature formulated by man merely acknowledges the uniformity, the regularity of one phenomenon, and not one single symbol can reflect or represent the universe entirely. We create a formula to indicate that we are conscious of the presence of a law; a law as realized by our consciousness. After all the law has been formulated on the basis of phenomena that we notice and interpret, and not the other way around. A law of nature therefore never exists in itself. It describes reality in a certain way.

Of all these kinds of reality we could symbolize the relation between the invisible and visible via a sandglass. The material and immaterial plane for instance could be symbolized by two triangles, which placed with their points together look like a sandglass. The triangle pointing downwards represents the total of the laws of nature, active over an infinite width but expressing itself in a limited number of chemical elements, which turn up in the middle point of the sandglass. The triangle with the point upward represents the limited number of chemical elements, which are combined into a limitless miscellany of modes of expression in matter. The number of combinations of elements is unrestricted, symbolized by the basis of the sandglass, where all created forms are found.

In the esoteric school the pupil is imparted interest and respect for the regularities in nature. For the devoted the esoteric school begins to unfold itself as a fraternity that teaches him the spiritual aspects of nature. The student is assimilated into study groups which mean an entrance for him into a unique area of investigation. If he does it right he discerningly follows what is told him via the doctrines, and nothing he takes for granted. Studying and applying the laws of nature evokes respect. In former days this respect was evoked through ignorance about the many fundamental principles. Much of what we think quite normal these days, was considered a mysterious or mystical phenomenon. The modern mystic does still envisage the forces of nature with admiration, but also for him a phenomenon like electricity is familiar and well-reasoned. He will just as little as somebody else put an electrical apparatus into operation with veneration and ritual awe. In that he does not differ from the nonmystic.

How can our self-evident dealing with electricity be consistent with our obviously reverent attitude towards less commonly known natural phenomena? The phenomena that were covered with a shroud were treated with veneration because they seemed to be close to the cosmic plane. They represented the mysterious, the unknown, but also the sacred, the protective. They made us face the fact that we only knew little of the forces that governed us. Through reverence we underlined the relativeness of the human capacities. That which was not widely known and was mastered by a few people, attracted us. The study and utilization of laws of nature that were difficult to penetrate resulted in us assuming a deferent attitude.

But in every era part of the research of the esoteric school ends up in the outside world. Part of the subjects that have already been studied finds its way to common science. With that the surprise about the unriddled phenomena slowly vanishes. But a good insight in the working of laws of nature alone is no guarantee for further growth on the mystical path. It teaches us what we can or cannot do, may or may not do in a particular case. It teaches us also which laws play a part in the circumstances with which we have to deal. It is nothing more however than a first step to controlling those laws. Nobody will content himself with theoretical knowledge of electricity. We shall want to give this knowledge a practical application. On the basis of the laws of electricity we will search for methods to generate electricity and to direct it for a special purpose with the aid of machines. The same goes for the psychical laws.

It strikes that science investigates the laws of nature as they are divided in different disciplines. Nevertheless the laws are part of one reality. Whereas some people devote themselves especially to the investigation of laws that have been subsumed under one scientific field, from birth we learn to live and work with laws that determine all sides of our existence. In mysticism

special attention is paid to laws that have to do with man's inner nature. In life we are continually confronted with them. We experiment with them and thus try to find our place amidst natural ordinances.

The pupil of the esoteric school distinguishes himself from the common scientist by applying ethical standards when employing his knowledge. A mystical study carried out in veneration and respect makes a mysterious light glow in us and thereby we are identifiable for other seekers. The characteristic of the mystical alchemist is, that he considers the subject of his study, the laws of nature, to be subordinate to the transmutation of his personality. By endeavour and struggle, ethical formation and study, he will undergo a lasting, inner change. The real gold is made up solely that way. It is not so, that he who masters the laws of nature controls the weaknesses and the strong points of his personality. It is not true that only those people have a grip on nature who have brought their being at a higher level. Whoever has a contrariwise opinion thinks like a magus and not like a mystic. At a given moment the intellect takes possession of the qualities of a law of nature and of its applications, and will handle them just as ethically or unethically as it thinks fit. That the inner personality may lag behind the intellectual growth has been demonstrated abundantly clearly, especially in this era with its scientific excrescences.

32. Trials and karma

An old saying goes that the gods put to the test whom they love. Many people let themselves be guided by this thought. But he who has much to endure is therefore not a chosen one. Trials are part of karma. In the light of mysticism this idea is more correct and more comforting than the thought that trial is a token of election. There have always been people who idolize suffering as a means or condition for growth. If suffering does not arise spontaneously they evoke it by tormenting or chasticing themselves. The effects on their health soon make themselves felt. There have been cases where one assumed that an illness had its origin in a special, divine election or had a sanctifying effect. It was not considered that also the neglecting of the elementary laws which take care of the preserving of a healthy body may cause illnesses.

Some people are of the opinion that whoever wants to attain illumination has to accept suffering as a necessity. They suppose a relation between the severity of the suffering and the degree of illumination. A different view is possible, namely, that in every incarnation the dosing of the karma is taken an impersonal care of, and not in a select way with which favours conferred upon one person are withheld to somebody else. There need not be an intelligence that at will distributes trials while elsewhere special favours are bestowed by reason of the same arbitrariness. The thought that some people are elected and others on the other hand are punished and live through one unfortunate event after another in a short time, need not evidence that this karma is portioned out at will.

We can consider karma a form of energy attracted or built up by the soul personality and assuming the shape of thoughts, feelings and situations which become attached to our personality. They bring happiness or misfortune to man or leave him untouched. In this vision karma reveals itself not indiscriminately, but in a systematic, impersonal manner. A harmful karma is harmful because the mind attaches that qualification to it. He who suffers does not always follow the inner way. Conversely, following the inner way can entail suffering. But also happiness can be an upshot of trials, for our mystical journey brings both. Why should anyone want to think that nature is oriented towards causing us grief? When we swim with the cosmic tide our karma will develop favourably, which calls to mind another saying with reference to the gods, namely that they help those who help themselves.

In life we sometimes stand before a wall, but it is in our power to gain a view over the sun-drenched garden that lies waiting behind the entrenchment and is willing to be discovered and trodden. It is not granted to everybody to make a start with the tearing down of his wall, and often one has cut off that ability by himself. If more people would realize this reality, their situation might improve considerably.

Many people are fascinated by karma. Not only do they hope to understand what it implies, but also how it expresses itself in their personal life. The characteristics of karma are just as complicated as the qualities of for instance love and to a certain extent they are comparable. If we love somebody we first must know him or her. We must feel a bond with the other, for else love is not possible. We can love humans in general or one human being in particular. In the latter case we often know quite a lot about the person we love: the expression of the face, the gestures, the character. Our heart and our inner and outer senses seek the opportunity to get to know such a person.

When we speak of love for mankind we deal with a form of abstract and inner perception. After all we do not know the whole of mankind. But both with a personal love affair and with love for the human world population we have to be tied to our fellow men, therefore to a subject, one way or other. Love is not an emotion that is a castle in the air and neither can it exist without an object. It is always the third point of the triangle. We are located on one point. On the second point is that towards which we are oriented. On the third point love comes into being, as the result of the reciprocity between the first and second point. Love does not exist as an autonomous phenomenon but it can be present potentially, like with future parents, who know that when the time comes they will very much love their on the way child. But we can think of the child as if it were independent.

The same seems to apply to karma. Karma does not exist as an autonomous entity, but it can exist in rudimentary form or wait for disclosure. Karma as an autonomous entity would only be possible if we could predict how - from an unmanifested, not personality-bound quality or event - it is going to manifest itself. The only predictable and perceivable thing is that the putting together of events will result in karma. However we cannot observe potential karma as if we observe a psychical being that, no matter whether it has been manifested into matter or not, has a recognizable quality and individuality. And yet we might 'observe' karma the same way as we 'observe' the on the way child.

Everybody lives daily through the manifestations of the law of karma, of cause and effect. This law can manifest itself in numerous ways, but in this consideration we mainly look at the effects that are experienced as a trial. Initiation and trial are very close. The first initiation and trial begins with birth because we have to leave the cosmic plane. It is an initiation because we change the immaterial with the material existence. It is a trial because, with the transition from the spiritual world to the material world, we have to let go what is connected with us. It is the lacerating feeling that we have been torn loose from our roots. The disinclination against letting go evokes the tension that we call trial.

The trials which are experienced by an incorporeal being cannot be intuited by a being that is embodied. Conversely, the trials of the physical beings are far away from the awareness of a being that resides on the cosmic plane. We often even do not understand a thing of the trials that other people have to undergo. Remarkable, considering that we all reside on the same physical plane. The trial of a being at the physical level is not completely understood by another being at the same level, no more than a being at the cosmic level can understand everything that happens to another being at the same level. One can very well imagine that a trial or test related to the earthly world has no use for someone who no longer resides here, for the consciousness experiences things which are determined by its own boundaries and those of its environment.

An example may illustrate that this applies to several conditions that the consciousness may be in. Suppose that we sit in a room where the windows offer a wide view on several sides. Through a small window a fly enters the room. From the outside world, where the real domain of the creature is, it unsuspectingly flies into another world. It does not realize that it will probably never again retrieve the window opening of its own accord. Everything looks normal. When the fly still flies about after several hours, it has in vain looked for the food that it needs to survive. It still thinks to fly in the open because the view through the windows gives it that

impression. We can foresee how this tragic misconception has to end. That is why we decide to take a glass, catch the fly and help it outside via the window. Our saving action is promptly misunderstood. The fly under the glass has nowhere left to go and gets into a panic. Just now it flew freely about and all of a sudden it is captured. It undergoes a trial of which it absolutely cannot discover the necessity. The brief limitation of its freedom has as its purpose to spare it a worse trial. Once the fly is outside again, it has no idea what the nasty experience was in aid of.

From the foregoing it may follow that the reaction of the individual on karma is dependent on his intellectual grasp and on the surroundings in which he moves. Whether he calls karma positive or negative is determined by the way he looks at life.

Trials appear to us in thoughts, deeds and situations and distinguish themselves by their nature and their presence. In their most subtle shape trials manifest themselves in the realm of thought and they are followed by acting or nonacting. The thoughts can be divided into two categories: the positive and the negative. An affliction hits us on the spot where we can be hit: our Achilles heel. Are we attached to possessions? Then our possessions become our weak spot. Are we over-sensitive? Then our touchiness can get us into trouble. Is our work everything to us? Then a trial in this field may hit us hard. We learn most intensively with regard to the subjects which set the pace in our existence. Is love the most essential thing for us? Then our most deeply felt experiences will occur surrounding this theme.

Gaining such experiences does not imply that spiritual personalities are at work who unleash something on us that they, through the matching experiences, deem fit for our well-being. It are impersonal laws that cause such experiences and that are activated automatically. It is a matter of course that we can learn something when we come into contact with something, and if this would end the matter, it would already be a very nice result. We shall investigate these aspects in some more detail. In doing this we also take into consideration for whom trials apply, what they mean and what their connection with karma is. Finally the development that man goes through under the influence of trials comes up.

The main group of the negative thoughts we can divide into a number of categories. We shall look at them in succession. First there are the thoughts that do not invite to acting or nonacting. It does happen that we are surprised by thoughts that startle us. They compel us to nothing nor want to keep us from doing something. They are negative by nature and therefore torment us: is it really us who think this way? It are for instance nasty images of a nonexisting environment like we know them from nightmares. Where does it come from? Did we unconsciously open a forbidden door and have the thoughts entered through that? We could call these thoughts negative, but neutral.

Next we know the thoughts that urge us to do something negative, or that want us to stop something positive from happening. They may call up dismay, as with the above mentioned neutral thoughts, but he who is morally sure of his ground will only observe such an impulse. We toy with it to be aware of the rational grounds by which we can do wrong if we really want to, and what means are at our disposal to perpetrate evil unpunished. For instance, after having heard a news bulletin about a bank robbery we contemplate if we would have been cleverer than the captured bank robbers, had we intended to plan the same robbery. If we find it hard to maintain or build up moral at a high level, these thoughts are the cause to a real fight between

the higher self and our personality.

Then there are the negatively natured thoughts which compel us to refrain from something good so that something negative happens, or which invite us to tolerate wrongness. They differ from the former category only to the extent that there is an urge to refrain from something or to tolerate something, and not an impulse to do something. For example we are aware of a wrongdoing that we could easily undo, but out of resentment or frustration we let it pass.

We have made a distinction between thoughts that do not invite to acting or nonacting, and are therefore neutral. Then we have mentioned the thoughts that form the urge to do something; to be subdivided into thoughts that incite us to something negative, and thoughts that invite us to prevent the good. Finally there were the thoughts that formed the urge to refrain from something; to be subdivided into thoughts that invite us to refrain from the good or to tolerate wrongness. So there are five forms of negative thoughts.

The other main group is formed by the positive thoughts. They can be divided into thoughts that are neutral and into thoughts that invite to act. The positive thoughts that incite to act can be distinguished into two subcategories. Thus there are thoughts which prevent evil from happening, or incite to pursue the good. Furthermore we know the thoughts that invite to let the good continue or to refrain from evil. Here the neutral thoughts can be subdivided neither.

The difference between the five positive and the five negative groups of thoughts is in their effect on our development and in their disposition. Annoying thoughts are often followed by self-criticism. In our hearts we do not agree with the negative ideas. Our moral standard is at stake and we try to expel the negative thought. We need not resist positive thoughts. It may happen though that they are instantly followed by negative thoughts which want to rescind the intended result and vice versa.

The thoughts that we have discussed can be followed by actions. A thought does not lead automatically to acting. Following impulses and thoughts, or rejecting them; the executing into actions or not: all the time it is the result of the dialogue with our inner self. Thoughts and planned actions first pass our inner self before we accept them. Part of the process should be that we make contact with our higher self. This confrontation assumes the shape of trial, temptation, attunement or intuition. Actions can, just like thoughts, be divided into five groups. Thoughts and actions each lead to their own kind of trials.

Finally, trials may come into being from the confrontation with situations. These can be divided into situations which affect us positively or negatively or are neutral. A situation only becomes a complete part of our personality if we realize it in our consciousness. Many situations where we find ourselves, logically stem from the thoughts and actions that we have made ourselves familiar with over the years.

On whom do trials have an effect and who are really involved with it? Most trials that we undergo in thoughts, actions or situations take place surrounding our own person. Everything seems to revolve around us, independent of the other. There are trials with which this is different. We all know the pressure that someone else's problems exert on us. The nature and the magnitude of the trial is then determined by the way how we are influenced by what another

person experiences. Everybody is open to trials. Nobody is spared the reactions to which the laws of nature subject man. Everybody, irrespective of his state of development, finds trials on his path. They have a relationship with us, and they are related to inner development. When they occur we can learn from them. Sometimes we have insufficient possibilities to do something with it at once.

Trials produce an effect in two ways: through their nature and through their presence. As a rule they are called negative because they have an unpleasant effect on our mind. They lead to stress, bodily discomfort, or take up a lot of energy. This discomfort arises owing to the trial being of a certain nature. For instance it hits us in the personal, financial, social or economical sphere. On the other hand the trial is an impediment by its mere presence. We wonder why the problem has to come precisely now and why to us. The karma as we experience it, is not or not wholly accessible and understandable to another person. This is because our response to karma is determined by the state in which our mind is.

That is how we assess the nature or the presence of our karma. At the same time through both factors we are limited in our insight in the karma of our fellow men. For their karma and their trials are coloured by their own consciousness to which we have no complete access. What one human experiences as a trial, the other may find quite normal or trivial. For the person who is subjected to it a trial may intrinsically be not so bad. The fact that it ends up with him may be of more importance to him when it means an interesting confrontation with a flaw in his character, or because it is an ever returning theme. An outsider might think such an imperfection uninteresting and be much more impressed by the actual contents of the trial that he sees manifested with the other.

We daily witness the effect that trials have on other people. The trouble that we have with understanding other people's trials is due to our consciousness, that classifies events into nature and presence. Depending on what is in keeping with our personal development and perception, we are affected by the most important of both aspects: the nature or the being present of the trial. It is understandable that only the person to whom the trial immediately applies, with all his conscious or unconscious knowledge of his own background and development, can fully sense the importance that an event has to him. He can intuit this better than anybody else unless somebody would be able of achieving total spiritual unity with him. But even the person who endures the trial finds it difficult to understand what is going on in his mind at a karmic level. Much will remain in the subliminal self. Therefore it is no surprise that other people understand even less of his karma. They are more remote from it. For that matter, as soon as our consciousness has knowledge of someone else's karma, it becomes part of our own karma.

It is essential for us to know why trials are necessary. When they are mainly judged by their nature, they will be harder to bear than when the reason for their presence is the deciding factor. For if we manage to find out why a trial happens to us, it is less interesting to know if it happens at a financial, social or other level. Some people consider trials a test. What matters is that the events enlighten us. It may be, that a growing desire for development, together with a real effort on our side to give shape to that desire, explains, why we sometimes unexpectedly must go through a kind of exam. By calling a trial a test we assume that our personality can learn a lesson from it. In this view the law of nature is directed by an intelligence that imposes a lesson on us, or the law of nature itself is this intelligence.

This must be distinguished from the notion that a law of nature is activated in a neutral way without it intending something, and without it being directed by a force that imposes a lecture on us. Perhaps both situations occur. Many situations we do not call a test normally spoken, like in the case that we burn our hand on a hot fire. The damaging of the nerve ends of our hand is impersonal and continues, even if we have no objective consciousness and even if our soul personality cannot become aware of this damaging.

In many cases the meaning of what we experience cannot be analysed. Such is also the case with trials. They are seldom experienced as useful. Why must this happen and why that? What is the use of this and what the use of that? Why must we go through this and why not somebody else? What we call useless is rather that which we cannot give meaning to with our power of reason. For our soul personality it may be useful and full of meaning. It is not unusual to blame ourselves when we are menaced by trials. The idea behind it is that what happens to us has to do with our deepest self. When we count on our thinking and acting finding their concrete shape on the spiritual or material plane, we may feel guilty when something goes wrong in our life. Apart from the cause of a trial we have the personality with which it manifests itself. The trial can be the direct result of our thinking or acting, but this is not certain. Where then does it come from?

This question is important, for it makes a difference whether we attribute trials to a cosmic test or to ignoring the laws of nature. In the first case we can live with the situation. In the second case it creates obligations to our acting and thinking, for then the karma obviously originates from thoughts or actions. If we go through a cosmic test on the assumption that we have to do with the karmic effects of our thinking or acting, then the almost impossible is demanded of us, namely that - while we have no perception of the relation between our thoughts, our actions and our karma - we do not lose our nerve, even if nobody can tell us why. If we then seek the cause in mistakes from the past that have not been there; or if we look for laws of nature that we possibly did not observe, there is no answer. Only someone with a deep confidence in the fair functioning of the cosmic forces, can then accept the inexplicable.

The going through a trial may be called a form of karma, even in the case that the trial can be interpreted as a test. Nothing happens without a cause. We have no guarantee that a certain problem will no longer play tricks on us in the future. What we do not think to be important now, may be important later and vice versa. It may increase our insight in the regularity of nature, and that certain trials return continually need not interfere with our pursuing a more refined existence.

Strictly speaking it is not correct to say that trials are a part of negative karma. The concepts good and bad, positive and negative, are moral conceptions of the human mind. For our purpose however the use of the term 'negative' is clear. In reality there is a neutral law of cause and effect. Its effect on us is pleasant or unpleasant, dependent on our standards and the way our mind reacts. Everybody knows, that trials give grief, accompanied by self-reproach, remorse or doubt. But even in circumstances that we should normally call positive such feelings occur. In negative circumstances it may be excess baggage from the past: an aspect that we have not sufficiently lived through in the past, or that has been neglected or mismanaged. There are many different causes of trials, and one of them we can exemplify as follows.

Parents may repeatedly warn their child for the danger of a burning fire, but warning is not always effective. A moment comes that the child goes to the stove and does keep its little fingers against it, full of incomprehension about the remarks from its parents. Then it quickly withdraws its little hand. The stove is 'bad'. The parents with their broader experience know what is happening, but the child reacts at two levels. On the one hand it has been frightened by the unexpected, painful experience. In this sense it finds it difficult to understand the bad stove for having caused a nasty pain. On the other hand the child realizes, that when it puts its hand on the stove again, the experience of pain will be exactly the same. So the child can relate cause and effect, but it has no sympathy for it and does not appreciate it at all. Later it will understand the patterns.

That the child lives through a short negative experience preserves it from trouble later, but it is good to point out, that the pain experience does not possess an intelligence of its own that makes itself knowable with the intention to convey a lecture. The child records the gained experience in its memory. Some experiences are activated only once and put on the shelf. Other ones must be put into the archives over and over again. It seems as if they continually walk from the shelf and walk out of the memory archive. And yet it is clear that new experiences do not replace our earlier ones, but are added to them. When the child is brought up without getting the opportunity to burn itself on a fire, it will without a doubt burn itself some time later when it is more independent, and gain a lasting experience yet. Through similar events the child learns how nature is put together.

The little child can be compared with the person who is hardly aware of the existence of the higher self. Around us we almost daily hear the question how God, when he exists, can allow such terrible things to happen in this world. This looks like the frightened amazement of the child that burns itself on the fire and does not recognize the cause of the pain. There is only the pain experience. In this the child resembles the adult human being, and the omniscient parents of the child resemble God. The parents find themselves at a higher level of consciousness than the little child. They realize that the painful experience has a cause. The consciousness of the child is situated at a different level than that of its parents, and if it increases, the child will learn to use more of its faculties. Through that it gets into harmony with nature. When we look back upon the experiences that have fallen to us in life, we see that trials cause changes in our mind. Negative experiences can have a positive result, if they throw us upon our own resources.

The trials that we would call positive, consist among other things of behaviour and attitudes which follow from voluntarily bearing responsibility. An example is the back pressure that somebody encounters who dedicates himself to fighting injustice in the world. By helping the suppressed he will antagonize the oppressors. The struggle with these trials is not easier than the struggle with 'negative' trials. Sometimes it is considerably heavier. Positive trials may belong to us for several reasons. They are a logical outcome of certain qualities in our character. They tell us whether we are suitable, less suitable or unsuitable for a specific activity. They can be compared with an entrance examination, which is not a pleasant experience but lays bare our abilities and weaknesses.

Trials are a form of initiation. They give struggle, just like negative acting, as if they are particles competing with other particles, like little weights that have been put into the scales of a balance. If one of the scales is filled a disturbance of the equilibrium occurs. The performing of works that are agreeable to our higher innate nature, makes the balance shift to the positive side.

Negative forces will try to bring the scales back in their old position again. This is the counter-pressure that we shall always experience.

One more example about the relativity of the notions positive and negative, to conclude our survey. A father and mother live with their children in a bad neighbourhood. There are many children in the district who are developing in the baddest possible way, being under the influence of drugs and committing crimes. The parents that we mentioned try to bring up their children with high standards, but every time the influence of the bad environment threatens to annul their efforts. They have a hard time educating their children, and their years are filled with worries. Must we call this negative trials? We are inclined to answer in the affirmative when we are in the middle of the process. Now suppose that after many years the children of this one family have grown up, and that they finally have learned to understand the wise lessons of their father and mother. Everyone else in the neighbourhood has gone astray, save these children. It appears that the trials of the parents have led to extremely fortunate results. Having reached this stage we might with retrospective effect call the trials positive.

Suppose on the other hand that after all these years the efforts of the parents have been in vain. Their children have got into bad ways, despite the wise lessons of their parents. Then we are inclined to maintain our former view that the trials are negative. Yet they have in no way become different through this.

The counterpressure for the negative consists among other things of the working of the conscience. When we are busy working on things that are in harmony with the cosmic laws, we constantly experience as a trial the back pressure of the negative. The negative comes into action to undo accomplished victories. This takes place at an ever higher level. Trials bring to light how far our insight reaches. Over all problems the light of our higher self shines. Trial arises from action and thought. Recuperation and correction arise from trial. Experience arises from recuperation and correction. And insight arises from experience.

33. Mysticism and mysticism

There are several forms of mysticism. Some are sailing under false colours. Pseudomysticism, which is almost a subculture, presents itself with all kinds of artificial and woolly theories. This puts mysticism in a questionable light. Nevertheless many people have the opportunity to take cognizance of the universal principles which are the domain of the mystic. It is not made easy for the Occidental to form a correct picture of the old, respectable and resilient philosophy of life that has been provided with the name mysticism. Although many people realize that there is a considerable difference between mystical and mysterious things, by many the thought has taken root that western mysticism is something of days past, that its practitioners were saints who were always in ecstasy and led a frugal, if not ascetic life, and that they must be rated among the literarily talented. Especially oriental mysticism has got the aura of mortification and asceticism.

The fact that mystics live amongst us even now, as citizens who do not attract attention or as scientists of world-wide renown, will astonish quite a lot of outsiders. For many nonmystics their first confrontation with mysticism is likely one of the causes of the picture that they have formed about mystics. At the secondary school it has become customary to mention a handful of mystics who invariably have left behind literary work. Consequently it fades into the background that people like Meister Eckhart, Teresia of Avila and John of the Cross, who are often cited, have had companions at every moment in history. Even when mystics do not come up during English classes but during history class, they are virtually always mentioned as the representatives of religions, whereas mysticism has known its practitioners in all epochs and in all ranks. Names like St Augustine, the Count de St Germain, Leibnitz and Einstein, who have let themselves be guided by mystical principles, are seldom told at school in connection with mysticism.

Except that they are reported to be literarily active, mystics are connected with ecstasy. There are many misconceptions about this. Someone who is intensively occupied with mystical labour for many years, makes progress. Even without achieving ecstasy he can be a good mystic. The real mystic does not make a flourish of his experiences and does have his head in the clouds all day. Not every spiritual event is a mystical experience of the loftiest order. There are illnesses which bring with them behavioural patterns that are erroneously taken for the conducts of a mystic who is in ecstasy. They appear with hysterics, epileptics or other people with an unstable health. These phenomena obviously cannot be traced back to mystical ecstasy. Sometimes ecstasy can externally be told from the person but if so, certainly not in the form that has just been mentioned, and also it must not be mistaken for a clinical picture. In older days society was not developed far enough to recognize that some phenomena that were rated among the ecstasies, were nothing but the symptoms of illnesses that were not understood and which were still out of control.

The mystical ecstasy is not a state of mind gained under the greatest self-torment. We know the importance of a sound mind, and a sound body not taunted by mortifications. In the world in which our physical body is situated we are no strangers or enemies. We belong there. Pure asceticism is unnecessary because it denies the reality of our physical shape. Should we go hungry and seclude and flog ourselves we would get hallucinations. They form a make-believe world for the real student in mysticism. A sound, well-nourished body that has not been

scourged by drugs or other mismanagement is magnetic and strong. Together with an ennobled mental intellect and a positive attitude it becomes a vehicle in which the inner self and the higher self can move optimally.

Achieving illumination or an ecstatic condition cannot be translated into words, although many have made attempts to do so. It seems more easy to describe what it is not, than what it is. For us illumination is a degree of a developing mind, not the final destination of our mystical journey. Higher spiritual feelings and perceptions are a stimulus, inspire to new thoughts and actions which can help our personality and mankind. Such a fairly serious way must find a setoff in relaxation and humour. Denials of the ascetic type rather form an obstacle than a help. We prefer to use as a model a good-humoured philosopher like Democritus, rather than somebody who is in sackcloth and ashes and with a long face preaches the world his suffering. When we have reconciled with the world, feeling completely at home in it, when our body and mind are one, we are in harmony with our environment. We do not accentuate this by being opposed to that world. Somebody once said: "The torn robe does not make the dervish."

After all the stormy changes that have happened to us since the industrial revolution, we are in dire need of a breathing space in which we can be on the look-out again for the true core in our human existence. Sometimes we think that technology has brought us on a higher level of civilization, but we do not differ much from the mediaeval men and women. They found themselves in a desperate position through the lack of knowledge expressing itself in physical illnesses, famines, wars. Modern man has the same problems, but more through unwillingness than through ignorance. From the ecclesiastical life in the Middle Ages that was intended to evade material stringency, we find ourselves in an era where a mystical outlook seems to have to fulfil the same role. An era also, characterized by a progressing decadence. We try to carve our way and escape material straits. This can only be through a spiritual method. It is not wrong that some people for material reasons set out on a quest in the mystical sphere. When they progress somewhat, it becomes clear to them that many problems originate from a wrong style of living. This is a discovery that may turn a wrong motivation into a good one.

There are big differences between the students. Everybody walks a different path. Whoever devotes himself to the application of mystical principles often has a range of extraordinary experiences behind him. As soon as we tread on the path our development begins to follow a different pattern, which partly depends on the journey that we intend to go in the future. There are numberless factors that explain why there are outer and inner differences of development between the students. This does not at all alter the value of mystical education, on the contrary. It is universal, valid for differently structured personalities. Yet in the long run in the world it will not create a standard mystic, or 'the ideal human being' who is the personification of what we call a perfect development and from whom we judge the behaviour of all pupils. Mysticism remains subordinate to us. We use the mystical truths to bring our individual nature to greater development, but we will never become standard personalities. Personal development - on the basis of established mystical principles to be sure - is the first matter of importance. If there should be a standard mystic it is the human who is unpredictable in all respects.

Mastery of life cannot be learned solely by studying mystical principles; we must apply and accept them. The study of mystical subjects is like a key that fits on our inner self. What we manage to realize has nowhere been put on paper. Each time another part of our selves

develops. We learn to divulge our deepest being and to enjoy the beautiful things that can be found there. Mysticism works as a catalyst. It knows many faces, in accordance with someone's development and background. The outside world will always keep seeing the differences and in vain look for a uniform development amongst us.

34. The realms of creation

From childhood on we live in the midst of many forms of life. We grow up among people, plants and animals, and the most important partners with whom we communicate on the globe are human beings. It is sometimes difficult to make the distinction between plants, animals and human beings. We all know sayings like: "This pet is just like a human being", or: "These people behave like animals", or: "This person only leads a plant's life." Depending on the situation we relate a classification to the moral or physiological condition of the ones involved. A child does not yet make a distinction between categories of creation. It does not distinguish between levels of existence, of sleeping and waking up, of being enlightened and not-enlightened. Nor can it make a distinction between several types of consciousness. But it learns - and is influenced by its parents in it - that humans allegedly are more important than animals and that animals are more important than plants. The parents themselves mostly do not understand this random, qualitative categorization. Why do they hold one thing higher or more important than the other? Partly as the result of their own education, through which they have learned to adopt certain things.

Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Jan van Ruusbroec and many others have dedicated part of their philosophy to the principle of gradual, hierarchical creation, of a stratified composition of the several forms of life in nature. In cabbalistism too, in the I Tjing, the Tarot, Theosophy and numerous other doctrines or directions of thought all over the world, one thinks in terms of a hierarchical structure of the universe. A well-known classification, which is used of old, puts that the humblest hierarchy is formed by the minerals. It are the nonvegetable, nonanimal and nonhuman materials.

In the realm of the minerals we have to do with a tranquil, rather immobile state of being. The second realm is that of the plants. In it a vaster form of life is visible. The plant is not always tied to the place where it is situated. In the realm of plants we find the mineral absorbed. It is a part that the plant cannot do without. The third realm of creation in this type of hierarchy consists of the animal world. Here also we see a great freedom of movement. The animal needs the two previous mentioned realms: the vegetable and the mineral, and sometimes representatives from its own sphere. Without these realms the animal could not exist. The fourth stage is that of man, the highest developed life form that we perceive on earth. Compared with the remaining categories man has a phenomenal freedom of movement. Not only can he move on over almost unlimited distances, but he can also travel beyond time and space, on the psychical plane. In man the mineral kingdom, the vegetable kingdom and the animal kingdom recur.

It is still possible to picture the difference between minerals, plants, animals and humans. Every day we see them around us. But we can only with difficulty imagine incorporeal forms of creation. The beings of this realm are called psychical or astral, although in mystical-philosophical literature and within occultism a great variety is made between kinds of astral beings. This ranking is related to their good or bad nature.

We have no idea of the needs and duties of life forms that are so removed from us. It is not clear where the boundary lies between the one and the other life form. We recognize the several modes of expression but cannot well define them. And if we define them, we do this by limiting their qualities. In that case we strictly separate the life forms from each other on a biological

basis, but a complete separation of forms in nature is hardly conceivable. There may be overlapping, energies that melt into one another. If a life form is characterized on account of its vibration frequency, there will be realms of creation with which it does and does not harmonize.

Everything moves in a particular spectrum, a particular band width of the cosmic. And within the spectrums we characterize the vegetable kingdom, the animal kingdom, the human race, and the astral realm. Possibly the borderline between the several realms is created by an abrupt transition. A gradual transition is also conceivable. What takes place on such an overlapping is a big ontological enigma. How must we visualize this? Are vibrations from the one realm of creation 'next' to the vibrations of the other realm? If they ever influence each other only slightly, are then the different creations allied with each other? Can it be established if a vibration influences other vibrations in some subtle or nonsubtle way?

In theory vibrations interfering with each other evoke a third vibration. Are there vibrations that do not interfere with other vibrations at all? Can they exist next to each other without exchanging anything? Our feeling says that they cannot. In the visible world the forms of creation are combined. The plant with mineral and animal. The animal with plant and man. Man with animal and astral being. The astral being, with man and perhaps thinner or fundamentally different life forms. We seem to be the only visible form of creation aware of its background and future. We master the realms below us but cannot live without them. And then again our dominion is relative: animals might disturb it overnight, for instance when insects should spread diseases or multiply beyond a controllable level. The planes are bound to laws, in relation to each other and themselves. We depend on the minerals, plants and animals, and we are not the end point of the ladder. Although we are not independent we have great liberties. That gives us a big responsibility. We must guard against misusing plant, animal and own congeners and must take example from positive life forms.

The human who does not meet the cosmic laws thinks that he is free because of this. In reality he is swung back and forth through his attitude. All kinds of beings and forces on the psychical and physical plane approach us. We can stand our ground by aiming at the affectionate and positive. In this development everything gets the right place. The knowledge regarding the existing realms of creation imparts to us reverence for what surrounds us. By recognizing differences we shall realize that everything has its place. The realms of creation have their own meaning. We also have a meaning, especially when we use our ability to attune to the higher self.

35. Amazement

There are people who are amazed about the variety of life. Others it will pass by completely. When we can be amazed about beauty we are not exclusively materialists. We do not require much to be rich and happy. Every day we make new discoveries. Every day we live a different life. Each moment life encounters us. Many material and immaterial things invite us to make investigations. We can even be amazed about our own amazement. Maybe it is because of the thought that only the extraordinary and the abnormal can evoke amazement, that so many people take no notice of the little, valuable gifts of life. Everything has its place, time and reason of existence, and shapes the universe. Everything may evoke amazement, provided that we are open to it. Once in a while banks of fog hang around our physical body, but when they hamper the view on the outside world they offer us the opportunity to behold the inner world.

The higher self speaks to us incessantly, although we often neglect it and seldom listen to it. It is always ready to show us beautiful things. If we take heed of the details of life, of trifles, it will inspire us. The heart that is unprejudiced towards the suggestions of the higher self recovers, even if the inner voice is in flat contradiction to the opinions of the outer self. For the normal mind the insignificant things seem of little value, whereas inwardly we feel that more can come to light when we look at them with different eyes.

Let us compare the problems of children and adults. The problems of grown-ups seem to have more weight than the anxieties of the child. The child finds that its problems have a gigantic proportion. Adults may neglect the problem of a child. An adult for his part is facing a puzzled child that does not realize the problems of an older person. Maybe in cosmic perspective the problems of grown-ups are indeed very small. That small things are important and big ones unimportant, depends on the point of view from which we observe them. Every subject in the existence is of interest. However we can choose to not investigate certain areas when they are undesirable for our development or plainly destructive. Mystics aim at subjects which really deserve their surprise. Also prozaic subjects come to life whereby they get a new dimension. Life is a sequence of wonderful matters. Through their nature mystics are involved with its investigation.

36. Mystical attunement

The word 'attunement' has been mentioned in the preceding chapters several times. When we are attuned we are aware of an affinity between our own self and something that lies outside it. A word like sympathy denotes this almost literally. Most of the time the notion sympathy is reserved for situations in which we feel an agreeable bond with something or somebody. Literally everything that is connected with our being and stands in the focus of our consciousness, is sympathetically connected with us. Sometimes in a way that we would like to change, like when we want to extricate from something that keeps us detained. There is also another form of sympathy, of being attuned. When we attune to places known for their peaceful and soothing radiance, we feel elevated. Attunement is a precious ability that penetrates every fibre in our body with energy. This is found with persons who have a good relation with each other and keep up a deep psychical contact.

Attunement may comprise more. Our inner consciousness can contact higher levels through an altruistic attitude. It is difficult to tell what kind of rapport is the most important. Perhaps we should look at this differently; perhaps every attunement is important, as long as it wells up inside us and has a positive nature. We make contact with soul personalities of dear ones all the time and these contacts are on all kinds of earthly levels. There are also contacts with others who are not so very dear to us, and even between us and our adversaries.

Attunement is consanguinity; a being aimed at, and interfering with, frequencies. Too often we forget that if we call somebody our enemy he too can designate us as his enemy. Often the idea that we deal with an opponent is a justification for hate or vexation. After all it is only an opponent that we are dealing with. But who realizes that others as well may think about us in terms of opposition? This does not mean that we should always try to attune to any sort of personality. The voice of our conscience should tell us how to act when we meet with opposition. Enemies, be they material or astral, will have to be vanquished if they disturb the peaceful order of humanity. Then intervening is a holy duty.

Attunement to others takes a special climate, but it is rather easy to realize. Nobody for instance opens his mind when we are unfriendly. It prevents somebody from making the step in our direction that makes us inseparable. There is often no greater blockade between two people than words. Words are a hindrance; they thwart attunement. They can be used as building stones but also as hammers. They well up in our mind and want to get out. Once they are expressed they cannot be taken back. We often speak more than we can account for and have great difficulty to ease or undo the effects of our impulsive pronouncements. What a difference compared with words that come from our higher self. They uplift us, and we experience their favourable effect. Well-aimed words perform miracles everywhere. Cold-hearted words evoke resistance. They alarm people, who feel attacked and want to defend themselves. If we want to perform our task which is synonymous with being attuned, then being silent, of all things, is the simplest method to attune to other human beings.

37. Early consciousness

I can very well remember standing in the living room at the window, looking up, when I was four or five years old. It was pretty dark already. Somewhere out there in the distance had to be heaven, as my father and mother by analogy had tried to make clear to me. I looked at the stars, whilst in silent ecstasy I imagined that God and the angels were there, which very much appealed to my imagination. When I stood before the window, it was as if in this inaccessible height, this vast stillness, this blueblack late evening sky with its little lights switching on and off, there was indeed a sacrosanct magnificence. Despite the fact that I understood later on that heaven is no material place, for me it remains the most beautiful image of this kind. Also because this perception was not wrong, but incomplete.

The human mind forms an idea of reality, which makes it difficult to tell to what extent the right picture is visualized in our consciousness. It is difficult to make the right assessments, and even among human beings we cannot always understand what is going on. We also find it difficult to understand the difference between the consciousness of illuminated and not illuminated human beings. No more than we can tell animals what goes on in the human mind, can somebody who experiences illumination communicate what he feels and sees. If the human mind wants to communicate with that of an animal, it can only be accomplished if the most outstanding mind meets the other mind half way. If the communication should be optimal man must descend to the level of the mind of the animal, without demeaning himself in the process. Thus a contact comes into being, although without both sides understanding each other completely. Just as much can we only contact a higher form of consciousness by being receptive to that excellent consciousness. It will not adapt to us, but will partly meet us.

In our childhood years our mind is limited. With it we can not see into the near future, simply because we cannot be informed about what happens in the world. When we are a child we can not yet on the basis of the knowledge that we possess form a general vision. One cannot make clear everything to a child, even if one goes to any lengths. The early mind can never be fully informed about the experiences that it will have when it increases in development. This is an inexorable law. The young child, in quiet ecstasy about heaven, could not but suppose that the world had started with its birth. It could never have grasped that before it generations had beheld the same heaven and had dedicated learned and philosophical considerations to it.

The undeveloped consciousness has another interesting side. The world is careful towards the innocence of children. We see how they live their own little lives, unaware of the dangers by which they are threatened, but also unaware of the protective measures that society - ideally starting with their parents - takes to guarantee their safety. When the child has grown up and considers this, it will be astounded by all the decisions that have been taken behind its back. Children live in their own world and have little understanding of their surroundings. When we consider our place in the cosmos we too look like children. Our physical being is protected from birth by visible, earthly guardians. But are we aware of all the good cares that higher forms of consciousness spend on us? If we are guided by higher intelligences in the same manner as children by their parents, we will only benefit the most from it when we grow up and approach the higher sphere.

38. Renouncing

When we have a goal in our life, we are drawn to it as by magnetic force. We may have a goal in mind that can be easily achieved, but also one that requires exertion. We may have one goal, or have the intention to achieve several things at the same time. When establishing our goal we sometimes do not at all listen to the little voice on the inside that can tell us if we have chosen right. Sometimes we think to endeavour the right thing, and only after disappointments come to the discovery that our plans are not blessed from on high. Results can be found when we work on them, not by only wanting to attract them. Through the desire to attract we reject. Through renouncing desires, we attract. We often do not allow ourselves time to listen to our higher self. It could be that we have something in mind that we want to achieve, or we want to avert losing something that is precious to us. Sometimes our intellect speaks so loud that our heart can no longer make itself cognizable.

Some things are not so much wrong for us intrinsically, but because they interfere with our personality in its attempt to develop itself in freedom. Being connected with something or someone, offers safety and security. But sometimes we must renounce. The higher self, that can take stock better than we expect, demands to be obeyed. If we do not listen a big struggle will develop that brings much misery with it. The gnawing feeling of uneasiness will remain as long as we resist the higher self. We may carry on long in such an unhappy condition. Although we are being torn apart by it, the hanging on to a wrong striving seems to be not as bad as standing with empty hands. If, in addition to our mind, we let our deeper self speak, we shall reach a moment that from emptiness we shall be uplifted towards new heights, to a new life. On the inside affluence develops, because we follow the voice that leads us to profounder experiences.

The time in which we threaten to be deprived of something, is important, but often it is also the time that new things await us. Something can fall on our way that as yet we do not recognize or re-cognize. It may be a person or a vocation. Something that really belongs to us. Something meeting the needs of our innermost being. Something that will bring accomplishment if we have the courage to approach and accept it, because it belongs to us. What we wish with our heart may manifest itself sooner or later. Sometimes we think that first we have to reincarnate for it, because we suppose that our time has not yet come. No thought reflects more irrevocably that we wish to renounce our desires. However what we had in mind for a next life often already manifests itself now. Our projecting it into the far future, to a next incarnation, indicates that we want to abstain from it for the present era. It looks as if we activate certain laws of nature with it, which may cause the things that we have wished, to come to us.

The technique to master this process cannot easily be indicated. When we have gained experience in this field nobody needs to explain it to us anymore. The moving on of desires to a following life can give an unexpectedly quick result in our present life. If we have a profound understanding of the continuity of existence and attach little value to the point in time when our wishes are realized, then the realization comes sooner than we think. We prepare what is necessary and do what is humanly possible. The rest we leave to the universal intellect. It has a time for everything, even in the 'now' that we live in. We need not save everything for the future, on the contrary. We live at this moment. The reality of this moment is our most precious possession and our energy should mainly go in that direction.

39. Interpretation

Through walking a mystical path we learn to look at the world in a new way. What we observe around us belongs to reality. But each of us knows how deceptive this reality is. A special type of light only has to fall on an object and suddenly that seems to have disappeared. A sound only has to sound a bit harder than the music that we are listening to and the music becomes inaudible. Optical illusion emphasizes that reality as we experience it and mean to know it, is largely based on the impressions that reach our consciousness via the senses. Is everything that we call actuality also 'real'? The invisible, intangible form of existence, of reality, is called actuality. When a sensation is evoked in the mind via the inner and outer senses, we take cognizance of that actuality in an indirect manner, and what we then perceive is reality. It is a reflection, and because it is knowable and tangible, it stands closer to us than the source, than actuality itself. The becoming conscious of the reflection is called the interpretation of reality.

If there are so many different derivatives from the actuality because our senses now perceive this and then perceive that, is then actuality still of interest and of immediate importance? Reality has many faces; now is there only one reality? We are continually confronted with realizations, that one way or the other are in contact with their origin. A red rose in a darkened room cannot be perceived. When we let in light slowly, we see the rose slowly getting existence as if it is being materialized from nothingness. So, changing the conditions under which our senses can perceive a rose leads to a better perception, a clearer realization of the rose in our mind. But is the rose that we see in the illuminated room really the genuine one? Is it actuality or still a reflection of it? Do we notice the red leaves and are they the real essence of the rose? How about the atoms that shape the rose: do we intuit their actuality? We can not see them separately. Does not this imply that we miss the reality of those atoms? What is the real rose?

Our mind can attune to a deeper form of reality by turning inside and thus approaching reality. But it remains a deceptive appearance. When we identify the earlier described rose and reduce it to its deeper elements, does this make us find the essence, the actuality and the true essence of the rose? Does it not derive its deepest meaning from the composition in which its elements have been synthetically absorbed? The red leaves, the scent, the stem with the thorns and the symbolical value that through the centuries has become attached to the rose, may tell much more of its actuality than its unravelled elements on a Petri dish.

Through polishing the diamond of our consciousness, the invisible rays of the actuality that fall through it, arrive brilliantly and flawless in our mind as realizations. In fact reality itself is a mirror. Everything is a reflection, at every level of the explored. Whatever we find, it is always the reflection of what lies deeper. What we observe may be reality, but we cannot observe all realities. The moon derives its light from the sun and therefore shines less strongly than the sun. The lake in which the moon shines derives its light from the moon and again is fainter in its reflection of the light than the moon.

Through the limitation of our senses and of our inner powers of observation the mind only perceives part of reality. We look down into the lake as it were, in which the moon reflects itself. The water surface moves, so that the light comes to us incomplete and distorted. This symbolizes the limited interpretation of reality. When the lake becomes like a sheet of glass our interpretation becomes purer. When we look up we descry the moon. Guided by our

understanding of the reflection of the moonlight in the lake, we discover that the moonlight itself must be a reflection. The source of the moon, the sun, gives more light than the moon and the lake together, but is temporarily veiled by the shrouds of the night.

40. Public servants

It looks as if a dissertation on public servants is a nonmystical nut in our thoughts about mystical life. Devoting a thought to officials who work in the service of the country can be justified however. Many mystical aspects are involved with their work. The earth is a place of residence for countless people, who try to hold their own on this spot of the universe as best as they can. To achieve this some live in seclusion, dependent on the necessities which they manage to raise alone or in cooperation with another single companion. Others, most of them, choose the way that runs through the middle of everyday life. Everybody seeks to fulfil a task that fits him completely.

In nature a hierarchical law determines that all manifestations have their own place and order. This order does not indicate a difference in quality, for that is a human notion. That which is above, occupies another place than what is below. From the positioning of the higher follows that it has the trait that belongs to what is placed above. For what is placed below goes that it has the trait of the lower. The world has a hierarchical structure at the psychical and material level. If there would be no hierarchy, chaos would arise. In every possible social institution we find hierarchical structures. Sometimes they are interwoven. Man can be found in several hierarchical structures, while in the one structure he takes a higher place and in the other a lower place.

The world is founded on hierarchy. The one phenomenon is placed in relation to the other. The part that is placed higher calls the lower 'lower'. That which is placed below calls the higher 'higher'. That which is below calls what is under it 'lower', which in its turn calls the lower part that lies above it 'higher'. From his place within the hierarchical structures man lives through his environment and is able to answer the inner voice and even give direction. From way back people, driven by natural factors and on the basis of agreement, choose a form of hierarchical administration that can take care of the social order. Of a later date is the extension of its primitive forms to larger governmental units which finally came to encompass whole areas. The dubious position in which the participants in such a governmental unit initially found themselves was improved. Their rights and duties became more accurately described. In every phase of the development of types of administration the meaning of the idea 'public servant' has been under pressure, and seldom has it been able to live up to its splendour and meaning.

I Tjing gives an excellent insight in the function and task of public servants. In its description of the combined play between ruler, noblemen and public servants it shows to advantage how much the ruler determines the nature of his assistants, how carefully they must be picked by him and what power he derives from them when they operate in his spirit in the country amongst the civilians. The blessing of a good ruler is concretely reflected in the conduct of his servants. The responsibility and devotion to duty of public servants are important and need not be a sign of slavish subordination to the laws of the country. They are aspects of a hierarchical structure that must keep a healthy society. The kind of work that the public servants perform is not the point. The spirit in which they do it, is. Under the most favourable circumstances they are appointed by the people to carry out the joint decisions for the people and with the people. Decisions which should be established in harmony by all echelons of the human hierarchy. When the office holders neglect their duty they injure the whole country, but when they understand their delegation in a mystical sense peace and progress may be the prospect of all inhabitants.

41. Insight

With a lantern the Athenian philosopher Diogenes was looking for a human being. Have you ever wondered if it was pitch-dark when Diogenes announced his seeming quest? And if it was not dark, why could he not just look around to search for that human being and was he in need of extra light to accomplish his quest? In Diogenes' method of working part of a mystical law has been demonstrated. Whoever is on the look-out for the unknown, needs light. Sometimes it approaches us and that is the other side of the law. Between man and the light there is a reciprocity which takes places at every moment, with people who work at home or out of doors (in science, in trade, in art) or who are otherwise occupied. Light shines through people who interfere with politics or enter the interiors as volunteers. The light reaches the people who work in space travel and the light also shines on the surgeons who carry out a complicated operation. The light shines on the composer and the sculptor and on the mother with her child. The light enlightens young and old, poor and rich, everybody who is receptive to it. It has always shone and spreads its rays for everybody, but it is not always noticed.

We look for means to find the source of the light because the voice of the unknown calls. We feel compelled to fathom the enigma that we are, although we must not be confronted to abruptly with an all-blinding wisdom. Otherwise our psychical centres, our safety fuses so to speak, would burn out. It is not without good reason that the esoteric school brings the laws of nature to our notice gradually. Too quick an education could severely disturb our balance. Being gradually prepared for new events at least anticipates this disturbance. But the opposite, namely achieving attunement, must be achieved after this.

Some who discovered the light have imparted us their results. Among them are philosophers and mystics, scientists and artists. But the most interesting thing is, that we can follow in their footsteps and can find and pass on the light ourselves. With this work we need something that keeps our interest and capacity for work going. Often it is the essence that we gain from the writings of mystics who have preceded us. The mystical scripts that accompany us and from which we gain discerning thoughts that support our growth, form a lasting source of inspiration. Every time asks for new inspiring thoughts which expedite the growth of that moment. We should keep in mind that it is in our nature to reflect on a beautiful thought over and over again and that we want to experience precisely what was connected with the era in which it made its greatest impression on us. From the attachment to what falls to our lot we try to take the past with us to the present.

Going back in the past with the intention to live through bygone times, curbs our progress if at the same time we do not take mental fuel from the present. Does this mean that suddenly we are no longer allowed to be attached to the mystical pronouncements that we have made our spiritual property? The answer to this is simple. Every moment new thoughts are available which are conducive to our personal development. The mystical works of others are useful insofar as they know how to incite us to go on. They are no purpose, but a means. When they have got us started they can be put down as instruments if we wish to, without their function being underestimated. Other tools may wait for us. Not because the old ones would no longer have any value, but because the new ones may be more appropriate for the yet untrodden segment of the path.

There are several ways to disseminate insight. They need to be carefully geared to one another. For not everybody wants to get assistance, and to mysticism many people even are allergic. The overtly referring to a mystical subject may cause damage to them. Maybe they used to be open to advice and now they are cured of it for the moment. Now that was a complete waste of effort from our side. We had much better be silent and give a good example by showing that we are capable of living harmoniously, which says much more than theorizing about mysticism. There are also people who are not interested in a good example. Maybe they think personal mastership is not that interesting at all. They only want to discuss what keeps them busy, find a ready ear or feel an arm around them.

In any case insight can be shared with someone else in a positive way, if only we attune ourselves to the mentality of the other person. When we get into contact with people who need moral support, we often intuitively know if this must be translated into a deed or into conversation. Words of understanding and a helpful attitude are first of all important as to their effect. They must not be presented to the other person as a mystical solution and need not be recognized as such. The advanced seeker recognizes them on his own accord. Someone unfamiliar with mysticism is slowly awakened by them. The background of our acting need not be explained. The result is what counts. Some people are helped when we give more than just our moral support through word or behaviour. This can be done by going more deeply into the nature and background of certain principles.

Whoever practises a mystical way of life, notices that the insight which he gains has been built from experiences. From experiences and conditioning new behaviour originates and this behaviour is going to follow a steady pattern. Through reflection and through the confrontation of the consciousness with this pattern of life new insight follows. We can learn to adapt our former insights to new experiences. Through maintaining this, we eventually create a mystical way of life. Later we no longer store insights unused, but deploy them as soon as it is required. Then we not only know what we must do to achieve progress, but also why. Insight and experience give us the chance to revise or to perpetuate thoughts and deeds, depending on what has to be done.

Both new behaviour and the continuing of an old style of living has a double effect. New karma is created and we are becoming aware of its intention. We discover what we can and can not do to make our development run satisfactorily. Through adjusting and making improvements we learn to deal with uncertain situations. The connection between our approach and the result of it comes to light. This we call insight. Then karma, trial and experience are no longer the random elements of life which they seem to be. They appear to be links belonging to one and the same chain. If we recognize this the beauty of life is more deeply experienced.

42. Question and solution

It is almost a contradiction that a problem for the greater part consists of something that is missing. A problem has a contents and this contents can be specified. Thereafter the right way must be found to solve the matter. Questions do not arise just like that. They are created. Little may remain of them eventually when they are analysed inch by inch. Before being solved the issue is formulated. Often it is not possible to characterize it well and thus to delimitate it. This gives a tension, like when the right technique to find a solution is lacking.

Maybe we must not fixate ourselves on the contents of a problem when defining it, but rather mind the effect on our mind. For instance, our personality may be susceptible to a particular kind of problem. A hot-tempered person will regularly clash with the opinions of others. Sooner or later there will be another outburst. A reason may be pointed out for any fit of anger, a so-called cause, yet the real cause lies mainly in the perception of the irascible person. Even the most neutral things are looked at by him in an aggressive manner. Latent, preconceived opinions come to the surface. Thus in combination with the contents of the matter a problem can arise that would have stayed away with somebody who has a less heated temperament.

We all have to face the mutual influence of our temperament and our environment. There is always some friction between the demands of our environment, and the wish to make ourselves felt and to stand up for ourselves and our principles. Whether problems do or do not stem from our inner being, or whether they are connected with it merely from the outside: the fact remains that they exist. Careful investigation of them is necessary to come to peace and quiet. This is not easy, through the resistances in the outside world. The defining and solving a problem belong to each other. The right approach includes an appeal to both logic and intuitive knowledge and is attuned to the nature of the problem. Several approaches are possible, for there is no universal way.

Through analysing a problem it appears which of its parts can be dealt with at once. A problem has not only an intrinsic side. Our attitude is also part of it. When we get excited about something, what creates the real problem then? That what we get excited about or the fact that we get excited? To be able to solve a problem we need information. It can come from the outside or from the inside. We get information by reading books, talking with others and learning how they have solved similar problems, or by repeatedly facing the same issue. From the inside, for instance through meditation and contemplation, through attunement in general, problems can be analysed. In a flash of insight it may become clear what the matter is. Also the technique to do something about the problem can be disclosed in that way. If the central point of a problem lies in an emotional attitude, the attention should go to that point. It must be tackled first of all, because it keeps dominating the rest.

The working on the emotional aspects of the problem takes away part of the difficulties, that often get worse through our attitude. Thinking about the problem, plus our emotional attitude, plus the thinking about this attitude, together create a new problem. It seems to form a cycle that cannot be broken out of. Meditation can create a distance to this burden. The faculty of thought and the emotions together form the bridge between body and soul personality. By eliminating the faculty of thought and the emotions as much as possible through meditation, we rise above the earthly burden and arrive in the quiet centre. There we may be furnished with a method to do

something about the problem.

We can reinforce the good, and shut out disharmony indirectly that way. Fighting against disharmony is a waste of force. Harmony is never its result. One can enfeeble the negative only by aiming at something positive, not by fighting the negative straightforwardly. That we ignore disharmony does not mean that we close our eyes to what is going on. It means that the wrong can only be fought by progressing forcefully in the good.

Sometimes meditation brings so much relaxation and calmness that a question dissolves into nothingness, without further interventions being necessary. Also a rational approach can yield a technique with which we can set about things. It can be a method that we already knew for a long time but which is pushed aside because it looked ineffective. Many people think that they can find a solution without making use of their intellectual faculties. But if we want to find spiritual help we first have to know the way to the intellect. Otherwise consulting the higher self is useless and we would neglect our duality.

A healthy concerted action of intellectual and intuitive talents leads to a constructive situation. So, besides intuitive insight solving a problem requires a sensible use of our brains. A problem does not have to be solved in a rational manner only. It would be a shame however not to use the intellect, for it is very suitable to discover the regularities of a problem. Solutions can very well be initiated by way of the intellectual analysis. It brings knowledge of the structure of the problem and this is always the first step towards controlling it. The better we have listed the parts of the problem, the more the chance increases that we are on to elements which unnecessarily blow up the topic or keep it alive. All the components of the problem have their counterpart. They may be neutralized with a means that takes the opposite direction. Contemplation and meditation can give an answer to the question which means is useful and how it can be applied.

An intuitively inclined human being knows what he must or must not do to solve his problems, with whose help he can try it, how long he must apply which means and when he has to start with them. Attuned to the peaceful centre of his higher consciousness he gets to the essence of the affair. Even if we think that the problem, plus our emotional attitude, plus the disappointment about results failing to occur make it more and more difficult for us, we can find the way to the inner centre. He who gets there, breaks through the vicious circle and sees everything cleared up by itself.

43. The concept of God

Before we accept or reject the idea that there is a God, we must agree about whom we describe with this conception. What definition is valid? How can we give proof that God does or does not exist? Which of those proofs, if they can be found, are valid for everybody? That we agree on something does imply a comparison, the setting alongside of each other of philosophies or ideologies or logical ideas. If we want to establish what God looks like, we shall want to call in the limited visions of our mind. He who does not want to give a thought to the existence of a higher intelligence, need not agonize over it. He who says that such an intelligence does exist should be obliged to give a definition.

We shall not reach an indisputable determination of the divine nature; it will always remain a consensus, an understanding between people. Theology has proven that there are many points of departure. Can there be so many definitions when there is only one deity? Those who define God as an omnipresent being will say there can be, for if God is unlimited many definitions apply to him. What is the opinion of human beings about God? Primitive societies seek God in forces of nature, statues or objects. Sometimes these are taken for a deity, in other cases only associated with it. In other cultures objects are said to be brought to life by the gods, but not to be equal to them. Many people join western and oriental visions that man is a being who is brought to life by God and related to him, but not equal to him.

In all societies we find deities which are without shape (amorphous). In addition there are gods tied to a shape or force, or equal to them. There are also gods which are tied to a human or are equal to him, the anthropomorphous gods. So there are several differences in the description of the divine principle. A human, an object, or a force of nature, is identified or associated with God. In the one case the human, the object, or the force, is equal to God; in the other case derived from God or related to God. With this the nature of a god has not yet been described.

Long ago the West has officially abandoned the old-magical idea of a physical deity. Under the influence of the doctrines of Christ one has changed over from a primitive, magical image of god to the doctrine of an immaterial deity, but at the same time the proclaimer of the new vision was called the embodiment of the deity. Furthermore we see that in the Roman Catholic church the idea of the embodiment of Christ in the host has magical traits. In Christianity the saying "I and the Father are One" may refer to the mystical attuning of Christ to the higher self. In mystical terminology 'being one' means that Christ was one in essence with the divine, one with his origin; related to it rather than equal to it. Man cannot easily dissociate himself from the idea that any human can be a deity, and this is less primitive than it looks. It is even stranger that we attach weight to the idea that the divine is an unpersonified principle, and that we only allow man - who after all is a form of energy - to be personified.

The notion of God has been stripped by us of personification, to such an extent that we have distanced ourselves from a stereotypic image of god: the god of Michelangelo, the old man with a long, grey beard. But why are we accustomed to the idea that man, who is a soul power too, has a visible personality? If we are accustomed to a physical human being, a personified soul personality, then what is wrong with also visualizing a deity in a shape that has a personified aspect, a kind of physical frame? By rendering homage to Christ as God, the first Christians did not adopt a new idea but continued the oldest mystical traditions, although they probably were

not aware of this. When they thought about the deity they saw it as a human shape. This is not strange, for if there is an immaterial deity that emanates everything, then his being expresses itself also in enlightened human beings, because they contain the divine essence.

Even if the enlightened ones do not present themselves as beings of a divine essence, their adherents may herald them like gods. It can be compared with a drop of water that is aware of itself and knows that in essence it equals the ocean. If the waterdrop would say to other ocean drops that it is one with the Ocean, the community might start honouring the drop as 'the Ocean'. Not everybody listens good to the waterdrop, for even if it stresses that it only equals the ocean in essence, this does not prevent other waterdrops from worshipping it as the Son of the Ocean and consequently as the Ocean itself. In an equal manner the concept of the avatar has come to life, who is identified and associated with the divine.

Having explored this path we still do not know who God is, what the means are with which his existence can be proven, and whether this can be done at all. The world has not agreed upon the way that man can obtain this kind of knowledge. There is knowledge that stems from logical thinking, and mystical knowledge, that reveals itself without the mind interfering. Somebody may assume, by reason of inward knowledge, that God exists. Logic seems too limited a means to come to the same perception. There are people who do not try to prove God with a profusion of explanations and confine themselves to pointing out that to them he is a supreme, universal power. Its image contains all thinkable entities. Technically this is a matter of logic.

Science unravels the physical world into frequencies or vibrations. Physicists assert that energy, like electricity or cosmic radiation, has a vibration number. The borderline between the material and immaterial is crossed at certain frequency levels. Our brain can try to image the most important vibrations in which everything is included, and call them God. It is not possible to calculate what the vibrational limit of such an energy is and whether there is a limit. Maybe God can only be realized in a relative sense, when we attune to an ever emptier sphere in which reason is no longer able to explain or clarify the experiences of the inner self.

This is in keeping with the findings of mystics. They assert that knowledge of God, gained on the basis of attunement, is not demonstrable to the outside. When somebody receives knowledge of this nature, it does not enable him to prove God in a mathematical sense. But he can be so sure of the reality of the divine as he is certain of his own existence, that neither can be proven in a mathematical sense. The intangibility of the divine principle has never dissuaded man from seeking his root. With his special frame of mind, he discovered that an important source of energy is housed in him and that from within he receives information about it. When the life force enters the cells or building stones of our body, there is talk of power, of human life. When the different cosmic energies have come together like electric wires and have created a living being, there is a tension between the one half (the most earthly part) and the other half (the most divine part). Although one part is in the earthly, visible sphere of living and the other is immaterial, they have a common source. The tension expresses itself both in the immaterial part of man and in his physical, visible body.

Man has sensed this from the old days, and this has brought him religion. We feel the need to learn to know our self - our inner self. Not the part that has arms and legs. With our mental awareness we seek our spiritual counterpart. Both attract each other like magnets. Our intellect

recognizes that we are not the one we see in the mirror, and that the body only reveals one side of us. When we look in the mirror we get no answer to the question who the person is who looks in the mirror. If we want to find it out we must begin with refining our exterior person and increasing its force of attraction. Then we get in accordance with the psychical part in ourselves, so that it meets us halfway. If besides this we also refine our mental being, just as we have done with the exterior body, then that side of us will also live through a development. In addition to life becoming more balanced owing to this, it also gives a subtle knowledge of what we call the higher self or, in the highest realizable phase, God.

One question we must ask: could we really fully realize the most important form of energy as we discussed it at the onset? It seems to be beyond the grasp of the consciousness of a mortal. Who can say that he has contacted the source of everything and that his consciousness has not become scorched by the most magnificent light? And could he maintain that he has gained the fullest insight in the divine nature of that source, in other words, that he has been able to encompass what by definition could only be encompassed by a god? Could it not rather be that the more our attunement increases, the experiences become of a more unspeakable nature, touch us deeper, raise us further, evoke more miraculous states of mind? Could we really have reached the edges of what the universe contains? As a consequence, would the one who asserts to know the divine in its entirety, be able to gain new disclosures in the future? Has his progress stopped now that he has learned all there is to learn?

On the other hand, who will blame us when we call some of our experiences divine? Who will deny us the beautiful, be it short-lived, impression that we know what God is? We get the opportunity to go seeking our true self or to refrain from this search. In the other case, so when we exclusively listen to our external environment and neglect our inner voice, disharmony will be the result. Establishing contact with higher spheres may not always give us the right idea about the nature of those spheres, but only our feelings when being absorbed in them count, and not the exactitude with which we define them. The light that fills us creates obligations. It must be passed on. This is mystical practice and it has everything to do with the concept of God.

The keys to the essence of the divine are within our consciousness. By knowing ourselves we learn to have an understanding of the creative powers that move us. Through taking these forces into account we are on our way to harmony. When we try to find the proof of the existence of the divine on logical grounds only, we shall never find the gratification in it that arises from experience. In logic we find a welcome second approach of the concept of God, but nothing more than that, for the science of the divine is in its deepest essence a matter of experiencing.

44. The unveiling of our secret

If something intrigues us so much that we are willing to give years to get to the bottom of it, we will divulge other enigma as well, when approaching the core. In our karma often a secret seems to be found that not only evokes our interest but is also of vital importance. Our soul personality and our physical human being both develop themselves randomly under the influence of divergent powers, unless these are concentrated in a certain direction, as through mystical training. Only then the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that our life is, are put in their place bit by bit. This contributes to self-knowledge. It may be that through it we are left with a special interest in things from the past. They need not be closed experiences; it may be anything. They may keep us fascinated so much, that from them we may derive a purpose for our present life, of which we have none at the beginning of this life of course.

We are born with a vaguely outlined objective. Maybe we intuitively perceive certain signs; peculiarities that penetrate to us from our previous life and which may be about to determine our present life. They may be desires, like the urge to carry out humanitarian work or to achieve esteem and influence. Between the first notion of these signs and the moment that they are elaborated lies a period of darkness. For when we grow up we lose the reminiscence of the signs, unless as a consciously thinking human being we try to open the closed door again. As soon as we manage to do so, we are faced with something familiar. It is a part of us and again the old memory calls us.

After this second incitement we are going to make an effort to build our life more clearly. In the years lying behind, the karma directly associated with our mystery, has just continued its work. We have gone through most of the karma without us noticing it. We were so occupied by life itself that we only thought vaguely about the inner theme of which we once had caught a glimpse. We struggle through this lonely period and finally make an attempt to outgrow what threatens to obstruct our development. This discharges into following the education that harmonizes with us. Then the struggle of the pre-mystical era is continued at a higher level. As soon as we begin to gain insight in the laws of nature, we make every effort to understand the signs of our incarnation. We consciously seek the meaning and contents of the secret. Little by little we perhaps manage to give the signs of our personality a place, when we have been up and at it lengthily. Thus our mental awareness gradually gets a mystical dimension.

Some critical moments in this process are unavoidable. The theme that was intimated for a moment in the beginning of our incarnation, initially adopted a shrouded shape in the following years, and became concealed through brain activity. What remained was a longing for the forgotten themes. As a result of mystical education they get more contours and yield up their secrets more and more. We are somewhat taken unawares by it though and may get confused through the succession of knowing and not knowing. From childhood we felt that we were attracted by something without being able to name it. And now that we learn to discriminate the contours, it is as if we see something new that we are not familiar with.

We are inclined to reject the new insights, and again we enter a period of darkness. But with every disclosure the real and deep essence of our desire emerges, showing us the relationship with our personal secret. More and more divulgences come. The feeling disappears that the solving and mastering of the secret is blocked. Better and better we learn to control the powers

needed to give everything its place. The recognizing that there is a yearning, the quest to disclose its subtleties, and reaching the target: it is all typical of us.

The mystical endeavour leads to an awareness surpassing the common objective consciousness. It brings our personal ancestry to the surface, but this is not the reason why mystical development is so important. It is true that there are purposes in life which have to do with our highly personal development and with the karma from periods of life long gone by. But irrespective of how we fit in these data in a new future, the attuning to the higher levels of consciousness is our most important ability. The divulging of the secret of our present incarnation finds its pinnacle in the contacts with the higher consciousness that guides us.

45. Protection

There are children who are born without protection, without love, without other people with whom they harmonize. They have nobody who takes pity on them. One can hardly imagine a more harrowing deprivation. The child needs parents who cherish it and enable it to grow up well-balanced. We are really blessed when there are people who trouble themselves about us with love. Many people who emotionally or psychically are out of balance have had trouble at home or do not know what security is. Only at a high price can we grow up without protection and love. If we have to do without it, we notice through the cry of our heart that it is very natural to associate with people who understand us through and through. It is not granted to everybody to enjoy this privilege. Unfortunately it neither has been granted to everybody to learn to attune to the spiritual plane.

When we have only just begun ascending the mystical path we sometimes think that the apprenticeship safeguards us against all earthly discomforts and that the path offers us a special protection. This opinion can not only cause unnecessary harm but also works stagnating, because we must not forget the mystical fundamental principle that thoughts and deeds are a main cause of what is bequeathed to us in life. When our radiance is harmonic and positive we can deal with much in life. When in our life we do not react in harmony with the laws of nature, it causes a reaction that eventually works against us.

Some of us may expect that mystical endeavour keeps them from the whims of fortune. To find out in how far this is right we must chart how we as mystical students handle our new field of study. At the start we know little of the energies that surround us. The result of it is, that we regularly collide with forces that want to send us into the good direction. If we do not open our mind we take the opposite direction and this may lead us to a wrong path. It is easy to avoid an obviously negative path, for we recognize it as such. On the other hand an apparent positive way may have a negative effect that we overlook. If our mind is well attuned we distinguish which road is acceptable. At the beginning we do not know this yet, so that we make the wrong choices repeatedly, with all its consequences. We make certain decisions by reasoning things out, but often we have an unconscious way of thinking that pushes us into a certain direction. For the rest it depends on coincidence where we end.

Mysticism tries to make us more receptive to the positive, by teaching us how we can get better attuned to the voice inside. Thus we learn to discern what situations there are, by what powers they are controlled and how we can adapt to them in a flexible way. This strongly influences the protection that we think to receive. Let us take as an example that we expect that we can cross the street with our eyes closed because as a pupil we will remain free from injury. It is totally true that the study of mystical principles offers protection, but not against everything. It also offers dangers, for instance vanity and overestimation of oneself. As students we learn to resist forces that try to obstruct the development of the human race or aim at destruction otherwise, but no one can protect us against self-deceit. Our biggest opponent is our own objective consciousness. It can thwart us during our whole life. This is why we unavailingly make an appeal for assistance when we cross the street with our eyes closed. A traffic situation has its own laws and it is fatal to mix up the effect of two laws of nature.

As mystical pupils we are protected indeed through our applying in the right manner the

mystical laws and the forces that go with them. As students we can be attacked from within and from the outside. On the inside and on the outside we are sometimes taken under protection and conversely we can try to protect others. But when we cross the street with closed eyes expecting that the cosmic laws will keep us from an accident, then we forget that our action may lead to an accident following a wholly understandable, natural law. Then we have not recognized an important mystical law and confuse inner protection with outer protection, that in this case we have under control ourselves. We do not understand that we are in a position to create a paradise on earth, and think that a kiss of life from heaven will arrange everything for us.

We just mentioned the distinction between inner and outer protection. Let us see to what extent these two differ. Our body reveals the inner self. It is governed by this self which uses the body as its vehicle. The vehicle needs its own kind of protection. The inner self can express itself when its vehicle is suited and the right laws of nature are activated at the right moment. The body must get the right food and create the right conditions under which the inner being can make itself knowable. The body must be able to fulfil its role. Consequently not only our vehicle but also the environment in which it resides must be brought at a higher level.

Our inner self can only use the body well if that has the entourage to stay healthy and vital. This offers protection. The environment must change when it no longer meets our inner requirements, or we shall free ourselves from it. This changes our life or it comes to a natural or unnatural end. We leave the old situation behind and enter a new field of life. When we are dedicated, and serious about the subjects in which we are educated, we begin to develop the certainty that we can withstand negative and dangerous things.

We shall not at once be able to benefit from this ability, but protection increases the longer we progress. At first we mainly go by what our visible school tells us, but soon we learn to trust the lessons of the higher self, the lessons that we receive from our inner school. Then our advancement really begins and we become stronger and stronger. We learn to resist the unwanted, provided that we observe the laws of nature. We come into touch with unwanted situations, undergo their influence, cannot yet exclude them but learn to defend ourselves. It takes an advanced consciousness to really exclude the unwanted, which is much more difficult than just making the unwanted endurable.

Somebody once said: "Give me the ability to change what I can change, the patience to accept what I cannot change, and the insight to be able to distinguish between these." The way in which we enjoy protection depends on the extent to which we are open to learnings. The subtler the lessons that we can make ourselves familiar with, the stronger the protection gets. In the initial stages we can be a toy of forces that want to use us. As we progress we learn to think things over and manage to keep out the energies that we do not want to grant admittance. In an ideal situation we do no longer bring about negative vibrations in our environment.

Because it is impracticable to always keep the same even-tempered mind, we regularly move through all these stages. As soon as we are capable of controlling energy impulses and exclude destructive forces, we move at a pure level that fits in best with our personal possibilities. We can also lose ground to the underlying stages, but the farther they are away from our goal, the surer it is that we only make our way in those lower regions wilfully. This we can do as an experiment. When we do a thing like this, we will have to realize how risky it is. It is better to

reside on the best level, for why should we jeopardize ourselves unnecessarily?

Once we can defend ourselves and neutralize opposition great things are possible. Our progress is mainly hampered by fear. It comes into being when our mind perceives something by which it expects to suffer. When the attacking element has been characterized our mind will try to check it or to give it a place. And although we often manage to do this, it is very human that now and then we experience fear. We have awareness, but we do not work with a neutral disposition as for instance white corpuscles do. When they notice that a strange organism enters the body, they fly at it. They do not wonder whether they will survive it. No, they are just themselves to the depths of their being and follow their assignment. Fear they do not know. If the corpuscles had no consciousness they would have no knowledge of the intruders that approach them and would never be capable of performing their task. The more remarkable it is that they just carry out their duties, not distracted by the threatening nature of their adversaries.

Through its inward knowledge the corpuscle is capable of carrying out the action for which it was called into being. The awareness of the little organism is limited, but it comprises all necessary knowledge to distinguish an alien substance from other things in the body. Through that the corpuscle knows what the real nature of its opponent is. And from knowledge follows control. If we are attuned to the higher self we see through things. They get under our control. When we know what the nature is of what appears on our path we can adapt to it in an instant. When it proves to be positive we immediately can strike an alliance with it. When it is negative we should resist it by isolating ourselves and by mobilizing protective forces, mainly by just advancing in the good.

Sometimes the occasion of such a sensible jump to safety seems to be a trifle, unimportant for almost anybody. But when we as mystics become mixed up in a negative affair we know if we must sound the retreat. We judge it from what we see inwardly and pay no attention to the outer innocence of what appears to us. During walking the mystical path we gain insight. We learn to see through things. When we deem it fit we put up a screen of light and through it stave off all the wrong things. In essence we are at the mercy of nothing.

46. Influence

By using our mind, developing plans and giving them shape in the earthly sphere, we exert influence. We use the same psychical, creative influence to bring about things which remain immaterial. The latter is not exclusively in store for those who have learned to use their psychical powers. All humans can build an immaterial reality with their thoughts. However, they seldom have hold over what they create. Their thoughts are like arrows shot by a blindfolded bowman. They end up everywhere and very rarely there is a strike among them. What difference is there between the mystic and the nonmystic in this respect? The latter determines his life by the contents of his thinking. He tries to transform his thoughts into deeds. He does everything possible to realize his desires. He works on the fulfilment of his deepest wishes. The mystic thinks and acts in the same manner, but additionally he uses the special ability of the human mind to attune, to gather psychical energy and to wait for a good opportunity to apply the accumulated forces.

We can psychically affect our environment. For instance, when we are at a place where people have assembled we sometimes listen passively to what is being said. Weariness strikes when the issue fails to hold our attention or if it is treated distantly. By doing nothing the situation drags on. Then the door is open to improving this condition. This is a good moment to apply our psychical abilities. Looking quietly around us we emit positive thoughts and then we stop thinking. In the end this need not take more than a minute. When a meeting bores us, let us do something about it. We are gifted with reason and willpower and with the ability to catch the effluvium of our surroundings. Why should we let the negative sink in if we can try to transform it?

If we think a company tiring or uninteresting we can visualize that we ask the attention of the audience. We bring it in an imaginary circle and take everybody along with us to peace and mutual brotherhood. We activate good will and tolerance. This has an effect on those present. Communicating invisibly with people is a responsible job, for there is not a moment that we cannot convey something of the energy that forms the mainspring to lead a mystical life.

We get to bear responsibility in proportion to the energy that we have evoked. What really matters is that we completely follow the will of the higher self when we mobilize our inner power and exercise influence. The sources that we make an appeal to are inexhaustible. Therefore we must first ask for insight; then we must know what to do; and finally we must act. The influence that falls to us through attunement to the universe, is the strongest power that can be evoked by man. In the long run it is stronger than atomic power, which in its effect on human civilization is limited anyhow. We may not abuse the available energy. Our ethical education must keep pace with the forces that we tap, while we keep in mind which cosmic impulses are dominant in a certain era.

47. The age of discretion

If we want to indicate that somebody can judge independently we say that he has come to the age of discretion. Discretion can mean that somebody is able to tell things apart and has learned that the one does not equal the other. He has learned to realize that everything has its place, that every single unity has its own beauty. Discretion can also have a spiritual meaning. It can indicate that mystical insight has been achieved. Before we can master nature, knowledge of the universal laws is required. Certainly, we can leave out the step of consulting our higher self. Without possessing the seal of authority we can if so desired unchain terrifying forces of nature. But in such a case we have not reached the age of discretion. Life has a great diversity and multiformity. Through distinguishing we can divide, classify, regroup. He who acquires this ability can actively exercise influence.

In popular speech one talks, besides about the age of discretion, about the age of the intellect. This indicates that somebody reacts in an intellectual manner to the impulses that approach his mind. It does not imply that this mind has been developed and has become accessible to impressions of a psychical or spiritual nature. It may be that the intellect, once it works at strength, is utilized properly, whereas the mind yet remains deprived of all the impressions of a higher nature.

Besides the age of the intellect and the age of discretion, there is the age of the heart and the age of acting. The acting starts with the utilizing of what has been distinguished, classified and regrouped. The crowning glory of the work is the absorbing in our heart of all the gained experiences; when we have learned to listen to our higher self and to the advice that it gives, then the age of the heart has come. When we let our heart speak we are informed how we can live with what approaches us. We shall attract what is harmonious and react spontaneously to inner impulses. Our being will automatically do what is good for us. Consequently we will find ourselves in a new phase of acting. Our actions are those of our higher self, just because we are in perfect harmony with it. The harmonic human being spreads light, like a diamond through which light shines.

Errare humanum est

Long was my quest for signs of heavenly light
As counterpart of everyday desire
For never is the heart more bright and higher
Than when its glow and opposite unite

But be prepared who seeks the fiery site
It can be done, but does a man require
Who always to the shadows did retire
And thus deprived his fervour of its might

Maybe the mistake of my course is this
- Now should I tell you any more, or naught
Or should, if this your pity does enhance -

Was there a pause when I was full of bliss
I really had a struggle to be fought
My fiercest fight was with a gentle sense

48. Courage

Courage is summoned up. That is how the saying goes anyway. Courage is not something that we absorb like a sponge, but a state of mind built from the inside. When we talk about courage we think of the risky enterprise of one or two people. It is a feature associated with heroism, with an ambitious undertaking that we are on the verge of accomplishing. We fulfil this task apparently without regard to dangers. It looks as if we wittingly try to do something that requires superhuman abilities, or is connected with the risk of bodily or spiritual harm. There is a difference between courage and overconfidence. When we go about blindly, endanger our life on purpose, or harm ourselves without the goal that we strive after countervailing the disadvantage that we undergo or the risk that we run, then there is talk of recklessness and overconfidence. These are two qualities which are unhealthy. Only somebody who does not listen to his inner self is guilty of it. He forgets that his life or that of others whom he jeopardizes through his behaviour, is a cosmic gift that must be managed properly.

If we are truly courageous we take risks wilfully, because we feel from within that we have permission to act. Maybe we cannot check which purpose our courageous conduct serves or how its end will be. Yet we undertake what is asked of us. When we are certain that we may act, then even the things that we seem to do wrong may be right in a higher sense. The counsel of the higher self plays an important part at establishing what is permitted. From the promptings of the higher self we derive the courage that we need to go on. Many of the failures that we have to endure can be followed back to actions that are not supported by our higher self. The human will fails when the strength of an inner approval is lacking. We certainly want to reach our goals, but the intentions that we plan to transform into action may be powerless.

When the higher self demands that we proceed to action then our intervention is required, cosmically desired. It gives us the strength to carry out a task. The cosmic inspires us. It may reveal the forces that want to interfere with the realization of our aim, and gives us willpower. When we have permission from within to embark upon a particular enterprise we feel charged up. No wonder, because energy is the material to create a new situation with. Energy must flow through our body and our mind, and it incites us to act. The courageous human lets himself not be stopped by anything or anybody, nor by someone who holds a misleading, different way out to him, a supposedly easier and more effective way. He will not be tempted. He does the right thing and intuitively knows which road is delineated for him. Even though we may lay ourselves open to taunting many a time, we will only succeed by listening to the higher self. This requires courage because following the road prescribed by the higher self means wrestling with our lower nature. It is not an impossible way, for soon courage goes without saying, and this we call vocation.

49. Purification

A distinguishing feature of fire is that it changes what comes within its reach. What has been thrown in the fire is partly converted into invisible elements. There are materials which remain visible and only change form. They become elastic, liquid, as is the case with gold. If we throw raw ore into the fire, the metal is separated from the other components through heating. The raw material is heated and heated again until it displays the desired purity. No sooner than when the ore is approached at its own level when the fire has been given the melting temperature, the metal comes loose from the rest. When the unpurified components have been separated from the metal it can be cooled down. It is left in its pure form and can be heated again at our discretion without it losing anything of its purity.

When we awaken mystically something similar happens. In our nonawakened state we equal the raw ore. We consist of a mishmash of high aspirations, noble aims, personal failings and being unskilled. What we need to separate our higher being from all impurities is a purifying fire. When progressing on the path something begins to glow in us. Our starting education has lit a flame in us that slowly increases in warmth and is constantly present. It only needs to be fed. We throw into the mystical fire an ore composed of the inadequacy of our personal abilities and the desire to grow. That our abilities are greater than we think is proven when the mystical fire has made a separation between the higher and lower components. When the cinders have been separated from the gold, the higher is released from the lower and comes to full growth and strength.

When we notice which effect mystical education has on us, the years that lie behind us seem far away. Their part is played out. They have been useful and maybe they were inevitable. Compared with the improvements which occur in our personal circumstances the initial years were only a beginning, but in the time in which a more stable life is built, the periods left behind reveal themselves again at a given moment. Numberless problems that were of importance in the older days, and were solved for better or worse, enter our mind again and are playing tricks on us. They betray something of a period of development in which we were less mature. This is a crucial phase, in which the mystical fire tries to dissolve the persistent, unpurified components of our character. If this succeeds, new qualities in us come to the fore which we bring into action successfully. The old remnants have been transmuted into insight and with it we can refine our character.

For the outside world the results need not be spectacular, because our field of activity lies in ourselves in the first place. There the results come to light. In addition we can perform visible or invisible work in the world. Purification has a purpose. Important is the intention with which we work on progress. We get the opportunity to become proficient in something. Our outer personality is disposed of cinders, so that it begins to resemble the higher self. Then follows the preparation to further work, in accordance with our personal history, task, capability and personal preferences. Everything that happened before, is history. If we let ourselves be depressed by what happened in days past, we drag old baggage along with us. Let us bring in the centre of our mystical fire the part of us that we have not yet dealt with, and we shall sublimate it.

50. Potential reality

Does a tree make a sound when it falls over in a wood, if there is no listener? According to the accepted norm the answer is in the negative. There are vibrations but there is no sound, because sound is understood to mean the mental impression made on the mind by vibrations of a certain frequency. The proposition is defensible however that the tree makes no noise even if there is a listener. This from the viewpoint that the listener himself 'makes' the sound. But what if we apply this reasoning to a wood that does not really exist and has only been concocted in our mind to attach to it our reasoning about sound? Does it make any difference - if we want to determine if the falling tree in the wood produces sound - whether we think in terms of a really existing wood, or a wood created in our mind to illustrate the example? Can we check our question about sound with an imaginary wood, in which an imaginary listener has been placed who can perceive the imaginary sound of a falling imaginary tree? Must we always think in terms of a really existing wood and can we ever determine whether a falling tree can make sound in a fictitious wood?

The meeting of wood and listener on one spot is no condition for the conscious impression that there is sound. Even without a wood, if there are no measurable vibrations that can cause a 'physical' sound, the listener can 'dream' up that he hears sound. We put ourselves in a reality of this order if we want to establish if the soul personality exists when there is no body to manifest it. It is a well-known mystical and scientific keynote that reality seems to be according to our definition of it. In other words, if we change our definition, our notion of reality changes too. The essence of any question lies in the way in which we describe reality and perceive our environment. We try to get a grip on the reality that we become aware of, by defining it. The world is unlocked to the extent that we can cover it with our senses and other capacities. Only when something comes within the reach of the consciousness it gets reality and we feel allied with it.

If the human personality consists of perceptions of the mind for which the brain is the medium, then what happens if the body is not capable of gaining such impressions? Has the body in coma a soul personality and a mental personality, of which the first has not been disconnected and the second has? Does an autonomous soul personality exist? The way we try to describe this personality depends on the way how we approach our physical, sensory reality. Can we, by analogy with the sound of the falling tree, put that there is only a soul personality as soon as there is a body, which is the physical instrument for the soul to express the soul personality? Can this be reconciled with the view of many philosophical movements that man has a unique soul personality that keeps its individuality when the physical body has ceased to exist?

In the latter case there must be a vital principle that existed before the body was able to be its vehicle. In the former case there must be a principle in at least a potential sense, that at the moment of birth is created, becomes manifest, from 'nothingness'. When we compare the soul with the tree, and the ground on which it comes down, is compared with the body, then the sound is the vibration realized after the tree and the ground have touched: the soul personality, as the realization of the coming together of soul and body. We can try to disentangle the nature of what we discuss starting from its principles - the soul and the body. In stead of it we can also see if man changes during life, how this goes about, and what the changes really are.

Let us take as an example that an event completely changes someone's life round. From that point a personality comes into being that is different than we could have predicted on the basis of our foreknowledge. Is the event that leads to the change of someone's personality created for him, or, turning it round, is it the disposition of his personality that creates such an event? Or is it that the event stands alone and would also have taken place without the presence of the soul personality, and that because of its own radiance the soul personality is drawn towards the event and gets involved with it? In other words, must an existing soul personality live through karmic experiences and does it need a body for this in which it thereupon changes owing to force of circumstances, or is a soul personality gradually formed through the body acquiring experiences? In the first case it is possible and in the second case necessary that the soul personality changes its shape during human life.

By experience many people know that they have lived more than once. They see that the circumstances in their present life lead to a continuous adaptation of the one they are. And besides they have memories about the old days. Experiences with reincarnation support the opinion that the soul personality exists autonomously and at the same time is shaped by the experiences in the physical body. One can also hold a different view, namely that the soul personality only comes into being as soon as the body has received vital force. If the potential soul personality, needed for this, together with the body forms the soul personality, the question arises whether the soul personality would not completely disappear again after the expiring of the body.

Up to now two concepts have been compared. The one was that the soul personality can exist autonomously. The other that the soul personality only comes into existence at birth and therefore does not, before this, autonomously exist, and possibly does not live on either. Is it possible to build on the second possibility, by already realizing in our mind the soul personality that does not yet exist (because the child with which it will manifest itself, has not yet been born) as a potential soul personality? It is quite a job for our mind to visualize a soul personality that at the same time does not exist at all and yet, or because of it, exists in principle. Potential reality nonetheless is a familiar phenomenon for us. We often judge the future in the light of what does not yet exist within the knowable world, at any rate the physical world. Future events can already be there as a mental concept, but it is not sure whether or not at the same time they have a more real, different kind of existence on the cosmic plane than only as conceptions in our mind.

Parents who like to have a child can already now determine that it will be born in nine months. There is talk of a potential child that almost certainly will ever be born. No one is able to indicate where this child is or how it will look, especially if no conception has taken place. Whether there is a soul personality that will at any time take possession of the earthly body that is prepared by the parents, or whether such a soul personality will only come into being as soon as the baby is born: the parents talk about a reality in which the new little child already seems to be completely included. From the fact that future parents discuss a future child and even have given it a name, it cannot be concluded whether the soul personality of the child already exists at that moment, or whether it is only created when the body sees the light of day.

How the personality of the child might look can partly be predicted on the basis of the genetic and other features of the parents. But this is the physical and possibly the mental personality,

which in mysticism is clearly distinguished from the soul personality. The parents discuss an abstraction. They will get a little boy or girl and can even have a boy's name and a girl's name ready in advance. The fact that their child gets a name that has been set aside for him or her, does not yet prove that the soul personality of the child already exists when its father and mother choose a name.

As one may wonder if the soul personality can exist potentially, one can also put this question with respect to karma. Karma reveals itself in accordance with the nature of a certain personality. Is it to man and his consciousness, as the soul personality is to the body and the soul? Has it an autonomous existence like the soul personality seems to have, or is it completely dependent on the actions of the human mind? This depends on our definition of karma. It is mostly defined as the whole of the results of our thoughts and actions. We can also make the definition restrictive: by calling it the whole of the just mentioned results provided that they are realized in our consciousness.

This makes all the difference in the analysis. Especially if we take into consideration that according to certain philosophies karma has the purpose to teach a human being a lesson. But can anyone who sleeps or gets into a deep coma be aware of his condition in such a manner that he experiences his karma? If not, it has consequences for the often heard opinion that the karmic laws impart a lesson to man. Karma consists of a reaction to thoughts and actions. If it also manifests itself when the consciousness may not be considered able to be aware of the manifestation, it might appear from it that karma has to reveal itself as a mechanism driven by its own power or necessity, regardless of the reaction of the mind to it. That would make it unlikely that in karma lies an intention to teach man a lesson.

It seems that there is no karmic intelligence imposing a lecture on the human personality. If karma would be imposed on us to learn something, then certain karmic events are of no use when our mind does not recognize them as such. Also, if karma intends to give a lesson it should stop as soon as the lesson has been learned. This happens by no means always. Think about the pain that we suffer after we have burned ourselves through imprudent action. Even if we resolve to be more careful the pain continues quite a while. If karma through causing pain has the object to draw our attention to an injury that demands attention, then the pain must stop if we comply with the appeal. That would be the sign for intelligent karma that the message has arrived, the lesson has been learned. But the feeling of pain may still last a long time, even if we have done everything possible and have learned everything that can be learned.

So karma much more seems to be an autonomous process that just like other causes and effects is neutral and must not be personified by attributing human adjuncts to it, like freedom of choice and intentions. If we burn our hand on a stove being fully conscious, we know from that moment that we have to be careful with heat. However it was not the intention of the stove or of a higher power to teach us a lesson. A common law of nature was activated. This does not rule out that from a certain event of which our consciousness can form itself an image we learn something. We draw our conclusions from it, provided that our consciousness is capable of doing so at that moment. When we are in a coma and burn our hand, the nerves of our hand get a mentioning of the presence of a source of heat. That our consciousness does not realize this, makes no difference for the completion of the karma, at least, if we define karma as the whole of causes and effects which, even if they are not realized in the consciousness, are tied to a

certain individual. The effect of the laws of nature continues in a normal fashion.

Karma as an isolated phenomenon seems not to be possible. Is potential karma possible? Yes, if we use the definition in which we call something karma if it is realized in our consciousness as such in no matter what shape. Then potential karma is included therein. Let us illustrate the interval of time between cause and effect as follows. If we drop a valuable object from a block of flats and realize that it may not come through the fall undamaged, then the effects are already known at this moment although they will manifest themselves only after a while. The karma has only partly manifested itself, for the object has not yet hit the ground. Theoretically the situation is not uncontrollable or irreversible. The karma is being initiated, prepared; it is developing through time, but it has not yet had the opportunity to manifest itself to the full. The moment we see the object fall and realize what the consequences of the fall will be, we may become emotional. At that moment and for that reason a new kind of karma comes into being, because besides perceiving potential karma of its own special kind, we add our reaction to the event, which means that we add it to our personal karma.

Somebody who is alternately conscious and in a coma, is periodically confronted with karma which disappears as often as he is in a coma. Suppose that he loses all his possessions while he is in coma. As long as he does not awake he does not care about the loss. The people in the environment however will assert that the patient is ruined and experience his reality different than he does. But also two people who have control of their normal objective consciousness and judge each other's circumstances look at each other's reality differently. A reality that is as a completed event discernible with the senses and the mind, or a reality that is gradually building towards its final phase.

51. Perfection

Why are we as humans put together so complicatedly? Could nature not have made us function somewhat easier and simpler? Why must well-attuned mystics still make investigations? Why is their consciousness illuminated on small parts of the truth and cannot they achieve full knowledge by means of contemplation and meditation? Why is our limited view so often unable to grasp the intentions of nature? Can it be that we place these interrogation marks because we judge cosmic situations with worldly logic? We are human beings and for that reason inclined to range everything under the pattern of phenomena that we know, which are analysed with earthly logic. The broader the sphere where causes and effects work together, the more complicated becomes their reciprocity, through which we can no longer comprehend their outcome.

We have no means to assess how the cosmic works precisely, but probably does logic work on all cosmic planes according to the same principles as with which we use it in a purely earthly situation. Nevertheless this is a proposition depending on our definition of reality and logic. May we carry it further to the immaterial sphere, including the spiritual planes, without adjustments? This is difficult to answer. There may be causes and effects in the cosmos that we cannot get an overall view of and which obfuscate our conclusions and possibly invalidate them.

Add to this that it is not surprising that the world as we observe it is inexplaneable on many points, if we do not take into account karma, reincarnation and such. Even if we do take mystical principles into account we cannot fully explain nature. By reason of a concerted action of causes and effects unknown to us, we may no longer be able to reason out reality. For instance we put the human, earthly question why we must invest so much time in our inner development and why this cannot go faster and simpler. According to our opinion and from the logic that we avail ourselves of, it is efficient to quickly and fully placing at everyone's disposal the instruments with which the world can be helped. Our logic supposes that any delay is damaging and therefore reprehensible and counterproductive. But this does not say anything about the cosmic aspects of any development in the world, or about the way that mankind should develop according to cosmic standards.

Our reasonings are incomplete if relevant causes and effects are left out of consideration. And an argumentation that does not take all facts into account is just as inconvenient as a false argumentation, for in fact it is an incomplete reasoning. Not every insolvable problem or an inexplicable situation will be solved or become explainable when they are approached from a mystical point of view, but the frame of reference from which problems are judged has an effect on that judgement and on the solutions that we shall find. When things are placed in a broader context our logic is sometimes absorbed by logic of a higher order. From this might follow why we are not instantly developed in such a way that we can raise the world above its difficulties in one go. The intention towards it is unselfish but it must be in line with the cosmic existing order. If nations must develop by degrees, then this high resolve outweighs a good intention that has come about through limited insight.

The thought that we are engaged our whole life with developing ourselves has a particular consequence. When our development never stops and when this belongs to us, we should be in harmony with our own nature. This point of view scares off, for it means that the world in all its diversity and with its apparent imperfections is in balance and in harmony with itself. When we

accept that it takes us a long time (at least to our way of thinking) to develop and that we fulfil our nature in spite of this, must we then tolerate the mistakes of another imperfect human being? After all he is on his way and imperfection and evolving belong to his nature. And is not perfection a final result that can never be achieved? May then the mistakes of other people be denounced?

In a nonsynthetic conception of the world we think that we must be able to be perfect at once. Furthermore we think that we act inefficiently if we do not quickly round off our development. If perfection is a goal, why can it not be realized at once, we ask ourselves. It is a mystery why we cannot be perfect just like that and why we are bound by evolution. It seems to be inherent in our nature, that does not only determine how we become, but also who we are. It is difficult to make ourselves familiar with this thought. It is logic of an order of which we assume that it tallies, without us being able to explain it further. It has a beauty that cannot be comprehended well. If we want a nonevolving human being who no longer needs to be modelled, we seem to ask for a square circle. Such a circle is impossible, because its definition should contain that it is a nonsquare, as well as a noncircle. One cannot extract these factors from the definition.

The cosmos is an evolving being-in-itself that can only be understood by us in that way, if ever we can comprehend this. Notions like slow or fast progress are subjective, emotionally charged conceptions, although in our culture they have a significance impossible to ignore. In the philosophical, biological and mystical interpretation we are beings that evolve. Perfection remains an unknown entity. It is a concept of the human mind with all the limitations that go with it. The question why we must fight for our existence and progress, and why it goes so slowly, has not yet been answered by that satisfactorily. We only know that we want to aim for an ideal future.

As mystics we occupy ourselves with perfection and imperfection equally. The cause of it may surely be that we want to improve our present position, and that it is more pleasant to look at the goal than at the point that has been left behind. When we are making for something, we must realize from whence we depart. When wanting to leap a ditch because something on the far side has drawn our attention, we take care not to watch the other side only. When taking a run up we divide our attention over the spot where we stand and the surface that has to carry us on the other side. We mind well how the near side of the ditch looks. A swampy soil requires a different way of jumping than a firm ground. Knowledge of the field that we leave must go hand in hand with the wish to reach the opposite side. If we are merely filled with the wish to swap our present position, and during the jump only have an eye for the opposite side, we may slip and fall on the crucial moment.

This is what we encounter in mysticism. Before pursuing something new we must be completely informed about the nature of the position that we are about to leave. Do we want to master the new, then we must first master the old. To achieve perfection there must first be an idea of what imperfection is. As many other things imperfection starts early in life. From the very first moment that the body is conceived there is this imperfection. The being that must be built is not yet perfect, not yet ready. The separate processes which take care of the construction of the body, work exhaustively and complete. They are perfect.

When a human being is born it appears that he is not yet consummated. Everybody in its

environment is ready to prepare the little child for its changing surroundings. Extensive protective measures are provided, because the newly born child needs this. Imperfection is no negative qualification. It is one of the charms of the child that it is imperfect, but so irrevocably on its way to development. What is so attractive about the nature of the child? That we get the opportunity to help it find its definite shape. And also that the imperfect leads to something beautiful, like a little bud is the herald of a beautiful flower.

Humanity is in the same position as the child. In stead of letting ourselves be filled with despair for our human limitations, we can accept the temporarily imperfect state with which we are so familiar. We drop more and more of the imperfect. This development goes slowly. It takes years; in fact it takes our entire life. While being fascinated by what lies at the horizon, we should not forget that perfection is only a relative notion, rather irrelevant for our lives. We never reach a final state of perfection. On our way to so-called perfection there is so much to enjoy, so much that can fill our lives and make it worth while. The whole process of making our lives more beautiful is enjoyable in itself, for we are prepared for perceiving gradual improvements. The things we can trace on their way to accomplishment make a greater impression than what appears to us as being already completed.

Take the situation that we are attending a play in the theatre. When we are glued to our chair as the spectator of a play, the events enacted touch us mostly at that time. Not when the play has ended. Being absorbed in the middle of the play while everything can still happen gives the most satisfaction. When the show has ended, has reached its completion, the great tension that we experienced during the performance has gone, because we are no longer participants. Maybe this is why we feel at home in situations which have to do with creating and in which we can still take a part. The play appeals to our imaginative powers and we actively join in building it. It is just as if we create the piece ourselves and mould elements which are under our control.

Our lives are like a play, where we are active and passive at the same time while we contribute to its completion. Every scene, every act, contributes to the whole of the play. Isolated these parts hardly have any meaning. But put together they lead to the finale with which the whole intention of the play is revealed. Its separate elements may look dull or uninteresting, but the process in which they are embedded should show their function.

The meaning that we attach to the separate elements depends on our understanding of their function in the whole. The so-called negative elements or trials might through it get a completely new importance, because we look at their function in the total concept. What seemed ugly or negative may become beautiful through it. It may get a meaning comparable to the grain of sand in an oyster. We call the grain of sand that has penetrated the oyster a contamination, because our mind reasons that the grain of sand is in an environment where it does not belong, and because we judge the grain of sand as an isolated phenomenon and not in relation to the special function that it gets when it enters the oyster. The grain of sand incites the oyster to make sediments and from there a pearl comes into being. That we like it, is determined by the condition of our mind. The grain of sand has been transformed into something beautiful. The so-called imperfect beginning appears to have become a different entity.

Likewise in our mind the initial concept of what we call alien, may get a different appearance when time goes by. This applies to trials too. They are like the grain of sand within the oyster

shell that provokes a counter-move. In our effort to weather trials we develop power. Opposition is neutralized and transmuted into pearls. As the oyster in its attempts to isolate the grain of sand, unintentional produces a beautiful pearl, so shall we in working on our problems achieve more than is needed for simply solving them. Such a quantity of mental energy is developed, that in the good sense we overreach ourselves and accomplish more than we had in mind. A trial is no contamination. Who would not speak highly of such an imperfection that is transformed into something of a higher order? Obstructions can be transmuted into spiritual progress. It is a function of imperfection that is worth considering.

52. Reincarnation

In the western world reincarnation is no longer under a taboo. For many it has no longer an unfamiliar ring. With the elapsing of the years the concept of rebirth is more and more accepted. The idea of having lived several times, gives us a new, invigorating view on life, but this does not say that the idea itself is founded on truth. Let us try to shed some light on this field about which not much can be said as it seems. When reincarnation is accepted as a fact, our concept of the world and of science changes.

Can reincarnation be proven? And how valid can evidence be at this point? The first question should be whether there is a reincarnation 'theory' to check for validity. In this stage of his development man does not seem to have gone beyond investigating reincarnation in an empirical manner. Within mysticism this is replenished with a theory, but it is rather brief and is founded on vibration principles, the law of the preservation of energy, and the rather dogmatic hypothesis that man develops inwardly, and that this takes place through incarnation, because one life is too short to develop completely. We must realize that the necessity or unavoidability of this complete development is no more than a basic assumption, falling within the spectre of the human philosophy which - as best as it can - tries to create an image of reality.

In mysticism departure is taken from the idea, that the doctrine of reincarnation belongs to the highest human insights and is universal (therefore the best one). In consequence the mystic assesses everything, so also what reincarnation means to every man, in terms of his hypothesis, of his insight. This means that he inherently does not want to have anything to do with somebody who tells him that man lives only once. A 'purpose' is a cultural creation of the human mind. It is coloured through our personal background, the education, the tuition, our country, the age in which we live. Therefore we come across the dilemma that we must admit that our insights cannot be totally dissociated from our background, and perhaps are not universal. When we accept that, it must also be clear to us - and this increases our dilemma - that it is by no means sure that the natural laws conform to our starting points, our assumptions. And then everything regarding the reincarnation doctrine lies open again. Because otherwise we must now conclude for once and for all, that a) our insight is infallible, b) we know without any doubt that reincarnation works and how it works, c) our infallible insight applies to anyone, therefore also to the opponents of the reincarnation doctrine, and d) our insight is eternal and will not be changeable.

I always wonder if with reincarnation we can talk about a theory, like: is reincarnation possible on one or other ground. And, if it is possible, would this make only one final analysis possible, namely: that it therefore exists? For how would it be possible that reincarnation that theoretically could exist, would not actually exist? With this I consider reincarnation to be something completely different from timetravel. Generally you hear people only wonder whether reincarnation exists, not whether it is possible. If reincarnation exists it is a natural phenomenon, founded on a law of nature, with which matter and soul personality go through cycles of unification and separation. If something like reincarnation exists, it will be a phenomenon that is not directed by man. Timetravel on the other hand is not a natural phenomenon. When timetravel will ever be possible, it will be on the basis of a number of laws of nature directed by man.

In physics people wonders whether timetravel is possible on the basis of natural phenomena, not if it exists. For it is no isolated natural phenomenon that occurs without intervention by man. Timetravel (if it is possible, therefore if it is attainable) must be brought about by man. This does not apply to reincarnation (if it exists and therefore is not something achievable but something factual). When scientists investigate whether timetravel is possible, they will have to put all kinds of questions to themselves about what time is, and which requisites there should be to be able to travel in it. When they would have found that those requisites can be met, timetravel would be within reach. For obviously the natural laws can then be applied in such a way that this is possible. This will not mean yet that somewhere in the universe somebody will ever have undertaken a journey in time.

The research into the realm of reincarnation is of a totally different order. For it is not about some action that one wants to undertake, and of which the only remaining aspect to be investigated is how it can be executed. No, it is about the question whether reincarnation exists as a natural phenomenon, not whether it can be mastered. Unless - but this takes me very far in my reasoning - in the far future one would be able to direct reincarnation at one's own discretion, on the basis of knowledge regarding reincarnation. This is, reincarnation applied scientifically. And this is a dazzling thought. For we are still far from the stage in which we can even prove in a scientific manner that reincarnation exists, that it is a natural phenomenon.

When discussing reincarnation one naturally has arguments pro and contra. Nonmystics limit those arguments to the indicating whether they deem reincarnation plausible (on an empirical basis that is, on the basis of phenomena and eyewitness reports, not on a theoretical foundation), or the indicating whether they deem reincarnation an unlogical thought. Here as well on an empirical basis, but then departing from the controversiality of the eyewitness statements, and less or not at all through denying on a theoretical basis any theory that departs from reincarnation being a fact. The mystic on the other hand aims at experience, nourished by a philosophy about the existing of reincarnation. And this is a difficult point, because the question is whether a philosophy has the same status as a scientific theory.

Whilst physics as a science exerts itself in developing a theory that must answer the questions about the possibility of timetravel, it neglects developing a theory that should profile reincarnation, while both are very intertwined. For if it could be incontrovertibly established that reincarnation is a fact, it will be an event of the utmost importance, worthy of a Nobel Price for physics. Because with that discovery timetravel - indeed across the borders of life and death - would be proven. Honestly, when utilizing the notion timetravel in relation to reincarnation there is a clear distinction with the notion timetravel as it is utilized by science. Timetravelling as science discusses it, consists of travelling with an existing physical body to a place and time somewhere else in the universe, with which this same body is maintained, and preferably can return to its point of departure unharmed, so at least to the place and possibly also the time from whence one has departed. According to the reincarnation doctrine we also travel to another place and time, but never again return to our point of departure, and we do not keep our existing physical body. Such travelling in time is therefore undertaken by an immaterial principle of life, and cannot take place via the limitations of the physical body.

Now, when we limit ourselves to the empirical side of reincarnation, and want to determine whether it exists, which arguments pro and contra do we then find? There are pro-arguments which are contradicted by a contra-argument and vice versa. By that I understand a pro-argument to be an argument brought forward by somebody who claims that reincarnation exists. This is, to be clear, not the same as a pro-argument on the basis of a range of established facts and perceptions that inevitably must lead to the conclusion that reincarnation exists. The contra-argument with that is not the argument against the reincarnation doctrine, but the argument that indicates why the aforesaid pro-argument need not be valid.

According to some, we find ourselves at any moment of an incarnation at the top of our abilities, because we build on former lives and on the insights that we have then gained. But then it is not clear why so many people are at the top of their development, and at the same time treat their fellow human beings with extreme harshness. For should not be the conclusion then that in former lives they would have been even much more cruel and heartless? And how can somebody who lives in deep poverty and suffers from it, be at the apex of his development? A pro-argument for reincarnation would be, that we need time to shape our personal development in numberless situations, and through that become an ever better human being. Against this argument can be brought up, that it is then unclear why so often we do no longer know anything about former lives, and why so many people still are not a 'better person'. It may be, that we no longer know everything about previous lives because not the circumstances of those lives are the most important, but the deepest essence that runs through it like a leitmotiv. Even in our present life many events have shaped us drastically, whereas we can hardly get a complete picture of the details of most of them. And this is even when speaking about one and the same incarnation. Just walk through a street where you have lived years ago. Try to imagine that you walk that spot again in three hundred years. Even now you may find it unreal that you have lived through so many important events, let alone that you might remember them in the future. Possibly the importance lies in other things that we take with us from life to life: inclinations, sympathies, feelings, deeper traits of character. All the circumstances that we have to deal with may in essence be of great importance for the development of those character traits, namely as catalysts, without us having the need to recollect any bit of the circumstances themselves.

The notion that we only live once, has been established in the West for many centuries. Numerous notions perfectly link up with this or are even its result, like the idea that we have only one chance to earn the hereafter and need the church or a divine mediator for it. Another consequence is the idea that God is unjust because he allows so much misery, and that the different lifestyles between people are inexplicable, as they seem so unrelated to their happiness or adversity. Another concept that stems from the thought that we only live once, is that we can only have one grave. It is the logical conclusion of this picture of reality. Should we take reincarnation as the starting point, we must conclude that we not only have lived several times in the past, but have died several times as well. And if we have died more than once, our body - when it was not cremated - must have been committed to the earth many times, so that there must be numberless places where our skeletons can be found.

Reincarnation leads to other conclusions as well. In the everyday opinion everybody has only one genealogical tree. If reincarnation is a fact, we have more family trees, for at birth the one time we enter family X, and with a next birth family Y, so that each individual gets a new

genealogical tree and new ancestors with each incarnation. Accepting or not accepting the idea of reincarnation may have more serious consequences. It could influence jurisdiction and psychiatry. If the judges at the courts were spiritually adjusted and would think in terms of reincarnation and karma, jurisdiction would look quite different. In actual practice those would be acquitted who according to the criteria of the present law should be convicted. On the other hand many would be convicted who get no punishment now. A mystically trained judge might in many cases discharge or convict, where a 'worldly' judge would do the reverse.

If reincarnation is not handled as an axiom for jurisdiction, it is very unlikely that karma will. Both can put a number of apparent injustices in a different light. The jurisdiction that the citizens are governed by, even if it shows shortcomings, is part of their karma. This need not be interpreted in such a way that the law is right for that reason. By human standards some causes are not followed by the effects that we think fit, for instance when in the legal procedures a technicality has occurred through which guilty people escape a conviction, and the law, for technical reasons, refrains from the correction that we think reasonable. Man lays down the karmic effects of his behaviour in his soul personality. An earthly judge captures karmic effects at the moment that he subscribes his signature to a sentence. The realization may take place many weeks later.

The cosmic can also lay down effects without making them visible right away. A big difference with earthly jurisdiction is, that nature connects causes and effects without working with the notions sin or guilt, for those are moral concepts of the human mind. In the next centuries jurisdiction in the civilized countries may undergo a revolution, providing that mystical views find acceptance in society, and that with the drawing up of laws an approach is found that is in keeping with cosmic principles. The same goes for the mode of operation in psychiatry. The treatment of psychiatric patients undergoes a change as soon as reincarnation is accepted as a reality. We can put that psychiatrists and judges who do not take reincarnation and karma into account, cannot do their jobs well.

Of a totally different order is the influence that reincarnation must have on religious territory. With several religions a person who has led an exemplary and pious life is canonized and held up as an example to future generations. Around such an inspiring personality not seldom a school or monastic community came into being. Members of the monastery stick to the regimen that was formulated by the saint. At regular intervals the united monks and nuns over the whole world say their prayers. Then also the patron saint is invoked, to whom the conventuals try to attune. One may wonder if a reincarnated saint ever notices that people concentrate on him for centuries and attune to him. It would be interesting to know to what extent the combined mental power of kindred spirits reaches him in a new life and whether this has a noticeable influence on him when he fulfils different tasks in a different life.

These examples illustrate, that mystical research must lead to unusual conclusions and questions. Much light will yet have to be shed on these matters. Whether there is a connection between our impressions and the past we shall have to find out for ourselves. No one can decide for us if we attach the right conclusions to our observations. There are methods with which we can learn to understand the law of reincarnation. These methods are developed within mysticism. They enable us to understand reincarnation not only intellectually but also at a spiritual level, for that is the authentic way of gaining knowledge.

Before we continue our investigation of reincarnation we shall for a short moment ponder how we can prove to ourselves what 'reality' is. Biology for instance can make clear to us what life is, but an intellectual explanation does not enable us to prove in a universally valid way that we live. Yet it is obvious that we are alive. So, our speech and vocabulary do not determine what is true or untrue, on the contrary. On the basis of knowable reality the structure of language is erected, which is a reflection of reality. What we experience inwardly or try to have confirmed with the aid of our mystical study, is only partly allowing conversion into the human language. We are inclined to judge the value of something by the possibility to express it in words or symbols. It appears however that most things in our life are beyond words and cannot be proved to others.

Somebody who wants to prove that he loves somebody, does this from necessity via the symbols that are a well-known phrasing for it, like the gesture, the look, the word, the touch. The one who loves can only fully grasp and understand this love himself. Somebody can experience the love given to him, in a more direct way than through the symbols used for that. This more immediate contact is psychical attunement, which comes into being when the radiance of harmonizing beings is clustered. Generally one does not ask another person an account of the genuineness of his feelings. We accept certain expressions of those feelings and others we do not accept. The feeling itself is something we do not tamper with. We assume that it exists, without asking proof of it from the other person. If somebody says he is happy, we do not ask him to prove it. He cannot and yet we accept his utterance as the truth. For us matters that only the other person himself can determine whether he is happy or not.

It demonstrates that our picture of reality continuously exists of suppositions. This also goes for reincarnation. The reality of reincarnation can be constructed through suppositions, but if we want to have a deeper form of experiencing reality we shall have to adapt our methods accordingly. The esoteric schools since a very long time make reincarnation a subject of contemplation. When we apply the techniques which are carefully developed within the esoteric schools, we shall get the confirmation that existence is continuous. When we discover that our inner self returns in cycles, the confidence in our deepest being increases. This confidence comes into being when theory, belonging to intellectual understanding, is supplemented with knowledge gained by experience.

First of all an open mind is required. Not a mind that is only receptive to everything new and fascinating, but a mind that with heart and intellect devotes itself to the study of the laws of nature. It may take one year, five or ten years, before we get proof that reincarnation is a common part of existence. The continued study of the characteristics of reincarnation will release something in us. Gradually we get to the point where we discover that we have two personalities. The one, the outer being, we already know as long as we can remember. In the second personality we recognize somebody with whom we are much more familiar, who makes up our real self and whom we lost sight of for a very long time. And maybe, when we have a good think about it, we remember that even in the earliest days of our life we knew this inner personality better than our outer personality, of which we thought for years that it was the one and only.

How will our mind get accessible to mysteries like reincarnation? It takes a prolonged training.

Our outer personality must really be a great obstacle to us through the resistance that emanates from it. Our soul personality sometimes feels protractedly hampered in its development. It experiences the body as a burden. If through mystical attunement a change comes in this unbalanced relation, both the mind and the outer body improve. The prevalence of the higher self increases. Our body is lifted up to a higher level through the stronger radiating inner world. Once it lets itself be guided by the higher self, it receives help, knowledge and cooperation, and becomes an ever more beautiful window for the soul. Finally our body makes observations that fit in with what is filed in its deepest memory.

This is why some outer impressions evoke images already present deep inside. For this the inner self and the body must be well attuned to each other. The body reaches this point through the digesting of the right food and the breathing in of clean air, and through meditation, concentration and contemplation. In our deep memory, in which everything is stored that belongs to the world of experience of our soul personality, the data are located which are collected in the past years and in the preceding incarnations. Impressions coming from the inside and the outside, and matching the contents of our memory, release mental images from it. This we call the recognition of an already experienced situation.

A mental image, which may have been evoked through sensorial impressions that are in harmony with our inner world of experience, may be connected with a situation that has taken place in older days. Impressions of reincarnation are often thus translated. It may also be that the impression is not really related to earlier lives, and only as to its nature, quality or essence or intensity harmonizes with hidden memories from our present life, or with another level in our mind with which it forms a synthesis. With a proper practising of our psychical qualities it is possible to distinguish these different meanings from each other and to tell them apart.

When an impression is really connected with a previous incarnation, like when we recognize a building that we have once lived in, then the means through which we become aware of this (the sensorial impression) is a key to an actual event in our memory. There are also impressions that only as to their essence match with a previous event. For instance in another country we visit a region that we feel familiar with. It may be that in an earlier life we have lived in the same country, though on a different location from the one we now seem to be so familiar with. The similarity of the atmosphere in both regions can be so great that erroneously we get the idea that in an earlier life we have lived in the region where we now find ourselves. So on the one hand our impression has to do with reincarnation, but on the other hand in a different way than we expect. The cause of the impression (the landscape) is then a symbol that activates with us the memory of earlier, related events.

Our mind may also receive other impressions that correspond with an atmosphere. Thus a sensorial impression of a wood in our present environment may evoke memories of a situation in a different country in a different time, when we were also surrounded by an abundance of trees. Only after investigation can we determine whether the image we receive is directly linked with being on a previous location or whether it is only familiar as to its emotional value.

What kind of impressions may one expect? It may be the profound conviction that we have already been somewhere. An impression about a social position that we have held in the older days may come to the surface. We may gain an impression about a place where we have once

been physically or in the mind. This may vary from a slight recognition to a clear image or a highly emotional shock. An object, human behaviour or a situation, may be the trigger which enables recognition. Maybe we only taste atmosphere, maybe we get clearer pictures. They may regard places but also persons or countries. We can learn to recognize from our past, say, a German or French period or keynote. In some cases we sense which person we were. The seeing again of an unsightly alley can mean the beginning of a journey back in time.

When particular places move us very deeply, it may mean an initiation that brings us in harmony with an unknown part of the person that we really are. An incarnation or a chapter in it may be symbolical within our pattern of development. Not only can we learn to know the past via symbolical ways, but a whole life can be symbolical. Knowledge about bygone periods of life is useful when it helps us forward at this moment, just as if we take a reference work from the bookshelves to refresh our memory. But it should not cause us to relapse into a state that we have outgrown. It is wise not to assign too much value to former earthly circumstances.

Reincarnation keeps intriguing us. Not only because we are fascinated by the idea that we have participated in social life in several epochs, see the light of day again and again, and gain new experiences, but also because reincarnation up till now can only be determined through inner experience. It must be possible to approach reincarnation like any other law of nature with the aid of our reasoning power. When we reject reincarnation it is not easy to interpret everyday reality, but neither is it easy when we do involve reincarnation, for that means that we make our way to the field of psychical experience. We will often have to make a stand when we hear others talk about reincarnation, because many perceptions circulate. These can be looked at from several angles. Reincarnation is not the exclusive domain of the mystic. If it is a law of nature we can accept and approach it with all sober-mindedness. So we must venture to react when utterances come to our attention that do not tally with logic. Not that reincarnation must be grasped with the mind, but when we analyse it with our brains it must be done correctly.

A regularly heard proposition is, that when somebody in the social sphere holds a humbler position now than in his earlier life or lives, his development is on the decline. This often comes up when somebody boasts about having been influential in the older days, as a king for instance. The listener easily draws the conclusion that when the speaker is no longer a king, he must have gone downhill. A number of aspects that have to do with this interpretation can be subjected to an investigation, for it is sure that we are tempted to analyse its principles. The earlier position of the speaker is set alongside his present circumstances. It goes without saying that the listener has his own opinions about progress and decline, which determines what conclusions he draws. He applies his own criterions. Somebody else will employ different standards. What exactly happens when we compare somebody's present life with what we think his earlier life implied? Can the notions 'progress' and 'decline' be tested against objective standards?

We shall examine the just given example about the king in more detail. Somebody - the former king - has communicated that in former days he has been a king. Now he is a simple craftsman. A listener who was kept far away from artisans by birth, who even may have learned to rather look down on these people, will not easily escape from judging the present incarnation of the speaker on this basis. From a king to a craftsman - the listener may think that this must be a relapse, if not a punishment.

For the sake of argument we are now going to reverse the matter. The listener is a scion of a line of artisans, who knows from experience what workmanship is needed for the pursuance of his profession. In each case it offers him great satisfaction when he sees a piece of work come into being under his hands. It is sharply in his mind what is said about kings in the history books. They waged wars, sometimes in the name of religions, were not so very particular with justice and grinded down innumerable innocent civilians for many centuries. It can easily be understood that a listener who is so well-informed may think it an improvement that the one-time king at last has got a respectable profession for a change. The notion 'punishment' will not cross his mind at all.

So we see that when somebody assesses whether someone else achieves progress or has relapsed, he judges this from his own background and experience or from the knowledge that he thinks he possesses of other people's tasks in life. This is our first conclusion.

Kinghood radiates a special fascination. Not for nothing do many people still think that a king is more cultivated than a craftsman. When we mind the social and mystical opinions, we see that they differ completely on this point. Assessing how kinghood historically is put together, we see that the kings that we know from our time only constitute a final link in a long chain of developments. They are associated with a dazzling royal household, tremendous wealth, supreme power and nobility of character. In very old times however it was not uncommon that rough men-at-arms conquered a piece of land and thereupon proclaimed or had themselves proclaimed king. This had nothing to do with good taste or inner nobility. It was a pure act of war.

The conduct at the court was in many cases no reflection of what we would call civilized these days. By degrees there came royal houses where more or less illuminated rulers held sway. They formed the haven of refuge for divergent folk of an exceptional character, like alchemists, artists, astrologers, scientists and philosophers. These persons did not only find protection there. Sometimes alchemists were locked up by the sovereign with the threat that they should procure gold or be killed. The court through its extravagances could never guarantee that it would be the cradle of a psychically highly developed king.

Although many courts at present are a paragon of refinement, acting decently has never been inherent in the monarchy. To this very day kings must fight for their territory. Certain rulers were imperious, degenerated or mentally deranged. Others were proclaimed king just for fun and discharged again from office in no time at all. Those who consider kinghood as the highest achievable thing and as the distinguishing mark of a developed soul personality, are not aware of this historical fact. Nonetheless a particular kind of court may very well have meant an extraordinary positive impulse to somebody who directly came into contact with it. But at a negative court on the other hand a weak personality might develop quite to the contrary.

So our second conclusion can be, that somebody's progress or decline cannot be deduced from his old and new position just like that. There might be a relation, but to find it out much information is required about somebody's status, the century in which he held it, the country he resided in, the demands that were dictated to him and the way he met those requirements. To pass a suitable judgement on the old incarnation we should know the opinions and the deliberations of the person in question as he saw himself in the time of his former life. Even the

former king cannot from his new incarnation gain a comprehensive view of all the causes that made him the king he once was. So it is out of the question that someone else, the listener in this case, could avail himself of such an abundance of details.

The issues raised through our instance are not yet exhausted. For what about the situation in which somebody has already achieved the highest possible social position and has become a king? If the argumentation that kingship represents the highest attainable level of development would be correct, one who has been called to kingship would stagnate as from that moment, for there would be no way to surpass this level of development. This must be set alongside the widespread concept that reincarnation takes man to an ever higher level of development. In this life the alleged former king may exercise the profession of an electrical engineer. It is difficult to recognize how his way of behaving at the court could influence his karma in such a way, that in the twentieth century he came to exercise a profession that in his former life did not even exist.

When judging the question whether somebody has gone downhill or has improved, it follows also from this how difficult it is to relate it to his occupation. In case of a relation between regality and the profession of an electrical engineer, the answer must lie in a field that is unrelated to the status that both professions provide in society. The relation might have to do more with the qualities of the person involved than with the fields where he applies those qualities, and this is coherent with the mystical view of life.

One can imagine that people condemn somebody for having been connected in a former life with the court of an exceptionally cruel monarch. But that alone is not sufficient to judge him. We should look at his personal qualities and behaviour. As one of a few good people he may have improved the situation of many unfortunates through his positive behaviour or hidden influence. The simple fact of his presence at such a court may not make him come down in our opinion. Important is the attitude that he adopted towards life. A king may deal with his subordinates affectionately or indifferently. But a baker can do this too, with regard to his customers. There is no extra virtue in being friendly as a king compared to being friendly as a baker. It is the inner constitution that counts. Someone's social usefulness cannot exclusively be deduced from his profession. Is a king worth more than a garbage collector? Just make all garbage collectors king for a month and make all kings garbage collectors, and see what happens: chaos on all levels. Everything has its own unique function.

In society making a career for oneself is considered important. Yet it is common knowledge that many people from all social ranks consciously abandon getting ahead, because otherwise they feel hindered in their aspiration to carry out a mission. They want to be at the service of a higher purpose rather than to earn a reputation in the outside world. Suppose that our former king who had a high position in the older days, now performs philanthropic duties in total anonymity. Then we can hardly insist that his development has deteriorated. To conclude we may remind that the value attached to making a career for oneself differs from era to era. There are times that society considers the conceptions progress or decline irrelevant.

The mystical point of view is that every position, every experience, can form the basis for understanding the beauty of life and may lead to being attuned to the higher levels of consciousness. Every circumstance creates room to gain experiences. Somebody who has a weak character, will in a position in which the temptations of abuse of power are there for the taking find the most efficient situation in which to work on such a character. And somebody who has the power to help humanity forward from an educational viewpoint may develop the instruments to that end. That human existence is a school brings mystics to not appreciating bad people for their affluence and not despising good people for their poverty. It is not granted to anybody to be able to judge all the causes of other people's circumstances, as no one can know all the backgrounds of his own development.

53. The mystic, a romantic?

Many of us now and again ponder over the question whether mysticism is related to romance one way or the other. And who knows we may admit that this is indeed the case. It is not so strange that within mysticism we do not bring up romance so easily. Even without it the world finds it very difficult to appreciate mysticism. And yet the relation between mysticism and romance is very interesting. What do we understand by romance in this respect? To get a better hold over this, we can connect it with familiar things. When we hear someone talk about love, we want to know what kind of love it is: parental love, love between man and wife, love of art. When we encounter the notion attunement we are inclined to ask: "Attunement? To what?" Preferably we try to link terms to something understandable.

Also when it comes to philosophical concepts we prefer to think of something tangible and this goes likewise for the concept romance. When we think of romance, we shall not instantly be inclined to analyse it as a philosophical notion but as something that stems from the palpable world. We think of candlelight, of two people in love sitting down in silence watching the sunset with their arms locked, or we think of a trip with a gondola in Venice. It seems more difficult, if not impossible, to visualize - or rather intuit - romance as an amorphous product of the mind, that is, while it is still an archetypical idea and not attached to an event that is discernible or that we can visualize from the outside. We can deal very well with abstract concepts however. Abstractions do stir up emotions even if they can not be connected with a physically existing person or situation, but they will always be associated with a person or a situation, no matter how subtle the association may be.

When someone talks about an abstract idea like insight, we understand what is meant with it, even if it is not about a specific situation. The same goes for romance. It is a conception in the mind and it can call up an emotional sensation in us while it has not yet crystallized in a visible form. We are more concerned with what it stirs up in us emotionally than what it actually is. Even without exactly knowing how something is put together we can work with it. Of most things we do not know by far what they mean. We are accustomed to that. Even when we do not fully understand something, we can handle it. This also goes for romance, so we will proceed from this conclusion and further examine what it entails.

Mysticism is interwoven with romance; there definitely is a connection. It is a connection that we seldom admit, and for a good reason. It is all too easy to give rise to misunderstandings with others and to make an unrealistic impression. The world explains romance one-sidedly. People see romance as a kind of dreaminess considered acceptable depending on the circumstances. We all know that this is indeed how romance is looked at. Should we make a connection between mysticism and romance, it might lead others to the conclusion that mysticism is all about dreaminess. Films, love affairs, books and music: they are full of romance. It has a playful, innocent, aesthetical and ornamental touch.

In some circles we are accepted with difficulty when we hint that we consider romance an indispensable part of mysticism. As soon as we say that romance is part of mysticism, the demarcation line between reality and fantasy becomes blurred to the outside world. And this whereas the distinction between psychical and nonpsychical is difficult to make as it is. Our feelings, thoughts and aspirations proof that we mainly function in the mind.

It is often alleged that we mainly function on the material plane. This seems a misconception. Even somebody who swears by materialism and denies psychical existence, is psychically occupied all day. He talks about the atmosphere that is there. He says he has "the feeling"; he says: "It is my opinion", "I think", "I am glad", "I am in distress", or: "How romantic this is", and yet he asserts that he resides in a purely material world and he makes false distinctions between what is true and untrue, psychical and nonpsychical, fantasy and reality. It does not strike him that feeling, grieving or thinking, as well as mysticism and romance, are psychical notions and that they belong to reality, even for the materialist. Without really being aware of it people take psychical realities into account, although this goes to a certain extent. And that determines to what extent the affluence of the higher levels of consciousness is accessible to them.

Experiencing romantic feelings is a psychical event for both mystics and nonmystics. But what is the intention of romance? Do we have any clue where it comes from, what it is? Is it a key to attunement or a cosmic gift with which our inner self is increased? We can consider romance a gift just as valuable as fantasy, creative talent and visionary power. A form of psychic light that has been the mainspring for grand creations and has always kept man busy. Romance is an aesthetical conception to the nonmystic. The mystic also considers it a practical instrument. Let us look at the practical influence of romance on the basis of a number of examples.

The first example concerns romance as the aspect of a magnetic personality. Certain people are characterized by a mysterious kind of gift: a magnetic radiance. In their lives or in their science they show a kind of exaltation, serious attunement and passion that can be described as a romantic force. If we can mention one condition for their success it is this force. Certain opera singers for instance have more influence than only through their voice. We are not only touched by the pure tones that they produce. There is something more going on, because the voice is like a key. A key of a cosmic treasure-chest in which lies hidden the warmth of a higher plane. There are famous musicians who rely on the same force, which is especially felt when they address an audience of music students. And thus many people have a highly romantic charisma. We get easily under the spell of personal magnetism and this is a kind of leg up to contact with a higher sphere, that is, if we deal with a positive person.

The second example is related to literature. The romantic, archetypical stories about Romeo and Juliet and other men and women who are united through a unique bond of love, keep their power for a long time. Century after century the praises of their trials and their victories are sung. Not because the depicted circumstances are unique, for millions of people have had to gain their loves in the same manner, but because Romeo's and Juliet's mental struggle is recognized by us. Although the outcome of their romance was fatal this does not put us off but evokes a powerful, romantic atmosphere.

The third example concerns the cities. Paris has obtained the aura of city of romance. At first sight Paris is a city like any other. There are houses and offices, people live there and traffic is racing. In spite of all that, Paris occupies a special place in the minds of very many people. It is the focus of many special conditions of the heart. The romance of Paris is partly the result of the effluvia of the artists that have sung about or described it and of the films and paintings that have been made of it. Partly also the result of other laws. That is why we have a place in the world that is the symbol of romantic feelings. It is for all cosmopolitans a materialized cosmic

gift in the form of a city. For less fortunate personalities Paris is only a place where people suffer poverty, where drugs are turned over or where other crimes are committed. Everything therefore seems to depend on our ability to attune to the higher aspects of this city.

The fourth example is related to reincarnation. He who imagines that he has been a guild master in the Middle Ages thinks it romantic. A nice job in the present time is only a dull pastime compared to that. The characteristics of the past are glamorized. If we could go back to the old times, we probably would ask ourselves with a shrug why the life that looked so normal then, would be so romanticized by us in later times. The opposite is also conceivable: that at any time in the far future we will get inspired by what has taken place in the twentieth century.

We consider the time that we live in quite normal. It is not distorted by romanticizing. We may have a romantic attitude but do not romanticize all facets of our present life, like our social positions, our personal adventures or the century we live in. The present romance is a reaction to the things that we perceive outside or inside ourselves. Our person itself as an observer stays rather uninvolved with this. It is very romantic to walk around in a moonlit forest, but are we not mainly romanticizing our stay in the wood instead of our own personality that is situated there? Of the past we mainly romanticize our idealized personality that formed the centre of situations which were or were not romantic. To put it differently, we find the present life romantic insofar as it concerns our reactions to certain situations. We do not think romantic that we find ourselves in the twentieth century, as the person that we are. Of the former days we mainly think the person important, as the centre of situations that we call romantic nowadays, but also as the centre of situations which are not.

The fifth and last example has to do with the esoteric school. In thought we often attune to others in the world who conduct mystical labour. How would all this have come about in earlier centuries? Our kindred spirits often worked covertly in those days, without the good relations that we avail ourselves of. They met each other secretly. This evokes romantic feelings and a certain tension.

With a few remarks about some principles we come to the closing of our survey. Romance consists of emotional feelings. It is a link between ourselves and the invisible sphere. That is what it is all about in mysticism - about providing a connection between spiritual and earthly things. The physical body uses normal food and if it is healthy receives all kinds of impressions, because in that fashion it works optimally as an instrument. Our inner body requires adapted food. Everything that uplifts us: mysticism, a beautiful painting, a good film or a good play, literature and other forms of art, a harmonic gathering with other people, or romance: all this constitutes the inner food. The inner life does not only take place in the esoteric school or in mystical work. There are spiritual elements in a nice evening with family or friends, or in a romantic film or in an excellent book. Likewise they are in a concert or a beautiful landscape. Meditation and contemplation sharpen the ability to estimate these things at their value. They are not mystical life itself, as people sometimes think, but they are a sound basis for it.

We have seen some examples of romance in daily life exercising influence on both mystics and nonmystics. We saw that the distinction between mystic and nonmystic, romantic and nonromantic is very minor. So minor that the distinction often does not come to the fore. The mystic and the nonmystic are not two different human beings. Both can be emotional, and

impressed by cosmic principles. At a concert there are not only mystics in the auditorium. In Paris it are not only mystics who enjoy its special radiance. Deep in their heart many people are receptive to spiritual influences because they are touched by them. Maybe they give it a different name but here the difference ends.

The mystic is aware of higher principles, examines them and tries to make them visible in his character, in his attitude, in his aspirations. For many mystics romance is a vital condition. For them it does not mean a wondering away from reality or a way to get rid of the day-to-day worries. No, it is an aspect of reality and as psychical food it is just as important as every other means to get attuned to the higher self. It is one of the easiest instruments that we can avail ourselves of to gain insight. We feel at our best in a romantic situation because it brings out the noblest feelings in us.

54. Place of refuge

Suppose that we were given the opportunity to create a world in which we could find a place of refuge under all circumstances. It would have to be a spot where we could hide ourselves. At the same time it should not be a real hiding-place. Furthermore we should not be allowed to escape the world through it. It should be more like a safe stronghold from which we could actively continue to participate in the world. With it would we not have created the ideal of many a human being? No doubt it would become an accommodation totally in keeping with the best that we can imagine. It would look just like we are inside. Shortly, it would be our own creation and a mirror of our self.

Can a mystical brotherhood be considered to be such an ideal spot? The word 'brotherhood' is a symbol, just like 'association'. We use such words to indicate a group of people who associate strongly with one another and are mutually connected. What combines two things must have something of both in it. One cannot weld wood to steel because the electrode wire has elements in common with the steel but not with the wood. Two objects of iron are related. Therefore it will be no trouble to weld them. When two elements are connected, it is by a means that must be related to both the one and the other element. When people meet within an esoteric school the joining element is that which has a relation with the separate members and with the school. The connecting element that merges both poles consists of the striving after high ideals.

As long as the three points (the members, the ideal, the fraternity) are in harmony they strengthen each other. Because people are not inert and form living organisms with an aura that changes from moment to moment, they are constantly at loggerheads with the counterparts with which they are connected, to which they are 'welded'. A constant exertion is needed to keep the existing link intact. This exertion is paying off, especially when it is continued for a long time.

Every day we are surrounded by the demonstrations of the human strength of mind. Much of what we see once began as an image in the human mind. It was visualized and couched in a visible, tangible shape as the result of inspiration and exertion. This is how our places of refuge have originated. What would have become of the great personalities in the history of the world had they had no places of refuge, had they only for a second let themselves be diverted from their ideals and wasted their time? When as mystical students we do our best and attune to the universal ideals which are at the basis of mysticism, we are in harmony, also with the school within which we meet our fellow mystics. Then we know how to transmute our self and to create every sanctuary we need.

The Wall

A human equals the medieval fort
Is tried and tested by the hostile fire
Surrounded by a sky-high stony attire
From which the boiling pitch is ever poured

As if this makes the squeezing sieges short
The footmen at the gate will not expire

As they await the hour of their desire
The hour they do the bastion distort

Now crushed and crumbled, rescue overdue
The child of feeble mind decays to dust
And walls eroded to the bottom fall

A ruins fair maiden shows and squire too
To whom the enemy did its tools entrust
Fails to occur offensive, freed are all

55. Future

Creating the good that we have in mind begins with the proper use of the laws of nature. The insight that we are better off when we are attuned to the higher principles in nature, means the first step towards affecting future life. When we recognize or apply the guiding principles of the cosmos, a future approaches that comes into being thanks to us, instead of despite ourselves. If we bring in our willpower the future will reflect more of our desires. But if we do not make an effort, a future will yet develop. A mystic wants to make use of his opportunities. The reality that originates this way, partly becomes the reflex of his desires.

Everybody has his own opinion about the way that the future should be moulded. How do we build a picture of what not yet exists? By starting from the data on hand, in hopes that we rightly judge the present situation. Of overriding importance also, is the way we look at our ability to direct the future. Not only looking at its contents, but also at the power that we have to direct the whole process.

A tragic example of how things can go wrong is the fate that struck the Aztecs about 1520 A.D. When the Spaniards under the command of Hernando Cortés paid their respects to Mexico, the Aztec chief Montezuma timely received the message through couriers that strangers had landed on the coast. He decided to tolerate their march, on the basis of the prediction of his far ancestors that white men would again capture the territory they had once left. That the Aztecs accepted this perception from ancient times gave the Spaniards the opportunity to seize the whole of the Aztec dominion. Montezuma, mindful of the prophesy from the past did not take over to the offensive. His priests prevailed on him - after having consulted their deity Huichilobos - to an advance that came too late.

Tenochtitlán's warriors proceed through the plains
Upset and feathered and lethally painted
Compelled as they are by the fatal conspiring
Of priests and of gods for whose purpose one perishes

We ourselves also often tussle with tradition, external counsel and doubt. On our road they can be obstacles that make the voice of the higher self unrecognizable. The wish to grow is of all time. And there have been obstacles in each generation. In the modes of thought of the old peoples we recognize ourselves only too well. Many people wonder how society will develop. Suddenly in the world all kinds of very far-reaching developments are in progress. The fall of dictatorships, the explosive growth of the Internet, the cultural changes which are accelerated through the immigration of refugees, are only a few examples. How must we adapt if this development continues at the same pace? And what will the new purpose of mankind be, if ever he has achieved old objectives, for instance attaining peace in the world?

The answer to this question is coloured by our present, dated view on what we basically need. History has shown that there is not much point in extrapolating, in continuing on the present development towards a future one. This goes for developments in society, and through that for

everything related to us. From the present a picture of the future can be painted, but it will be superseded. Yet there is nothing wrong with forming an image, because conceptualization is the first step towards realization of something new.

If we want to know how the future will look, taking our present system of concepts into account, we can consider a nonindustrial, primitive society. In primitive circumstances man needs the greater part of his time to supply the necessities of life: eating, clothing, shelter. At the same time he derives psychical satisfaction from the fulfilment of his elementary needs even in that stage. These, together with sexual intercourse, are needed for the continued existence of his physical system, but they also give him pleasure and form a pleasant psychical stimulus. Clothing is necessary to avoid succumbing to cold or heat, but also gives the opportunity to distinguish oneself from others, which meets a psychical demand. The same goes for accommodation and the other requirements.

As long as the need for them is immediately connected with survival the emphasis is still on obtaining those things. Once this stage has passed, the psychical pleasure is going to count more and more. Man is then still adjusted to material things. He has no time for reflection and much less he gets around to mystical growth and development. When he progresses, arranges society better, industrializes and allocates his tasks, he gets free time available, and can give attention to cultures of a different order, to philosophy and art.

That is the moment where psychical satisfaction turns into spiritual satisfaction. This transition from the one stage to the other cannot be marked sharply, neither for individuals nor for a nation. We develop by degrees from materially and psychically orientated into materially, psychically and spiritually orientated persons. As this change is highly individual, we find in every epoch materialistic as well as spiritual people, with all their conceivable gradations. Even the most primitive human being makes works of art and because of that attunes to the aesthetic little flame waiting in him to be blown. The materialistic people find their pendants in developed humans who worry about the fate of the world and who place their knowledge in the service of their fellow men.

How does the future look when our spiritual development progresses? Let us assume for a second that in the future no country is at war with another, that famine is an outdated notion and environmental pollution has been rectified. What will be our new purpose then? We can devote ourselves to the exploration of nature, to the fine arts or to making our environment more pleasant. Our material needs are supplied. The enjoyment that we still want to furnish ourselves with, will have a material and psychical character, with the emphasis on the spiritual.

Is there a big difference between a materially and a nonmaterialistically inclined person? The material human being derives pleasure from power, influence and money, but eventually all these things are means to a purpose, namely the kind of psychical sensation that he is in want of. Not the money itself is important to him but the feeling that he derives from it: self-confidence, esteem, security. Power is not at stake, but the psychical notion of it, of the status and the influence that emanate from it. Every one of them is a psychical sensation. The distinction between a materialist and a nonmaterialist lies in the issue and the level of what they try to achieve and in their attachment to it, and in the level of the psychical or spiritual pleasure that

falls to them.

It is not inconceivable that the future brings us a human being that is looking for aesthetical or psychical pleasures the whole day without being spiritual, and that with it a completely new being originates that meets with just as little appreciation as our current materialist: the immaterialist. Somebody who pursues psychical pleasures and who is just as less disengaged as the materialist. The one thing that we know now, is that we constantly change the levels on which we experience reality.

56. Virtues

It is possible to compile a list with human virtues that run in the dozens. It is nice to reflect about such an abundance of positive human characteristics and to wonder if there are a few amongst them that we may call ours. The real art is being honest and to admit that there are virtues which we do not possess. Some are permanently present, others drop by now and then. It is tempting to be selective in our self-examination and to flatter its conclusions. Impatience and aggressiveness will then be called enthusiasm and perseverance. Hot-temperedness is self-assertion, laxity deliberation. And what about a virtue like self-confidence. It is not an easy thing to establish whether this is a quality that we miss and have to acquire or a quality that we already possess, forming our strong point. Even more difficult to establish perhaps is whether it is a virtue at all.

There are words that indicate a clear virtue; other ones are less clear in it. Take a notion like gallantry, which is a virtue as far as we can see. But can it be just a cultural quality in stead? If gallantry means that we hold a door for somebody while over our shoulder we inattentively maintain our conversation with somebody else, then gallantry has been reduced to an act that remains formal, that we do not put our heart in.

Virtue may deteriorate to idleness, but there may be other reasons why a virtue need not speak for us just like that. If through education and training we have become forgiving, is it then still a virtue if we cannot act differently anymore? With a virtue we think of a positive quality that is consciously strived after by the intellect. It is practised as an exercise of the will that repeatedly requires renewal. When a quality is already completely united with our inner self, is the virtue still a virtue then? When somebody wrestles a lot with his tendency not to be forgiving, we can easier acknowledge this as a virtue than when the same person had no difficulty whatsoever with forgiving.

The basis behind every virtue seems to be the endeavour. The virtue is the final result. We appreciate somebody who does his best to train himself. He who masters a virtue without trouble hardly raises admiration. There is nothing clever in doing something well automatically and without effort, is the reasoning behind it. The endeavour implicates that a choice has been made. The virtue will be attained later when the inner light has found an opening to shine through. An activity becomes matter-of-course when we are occupied with it for a long time. This also happens with mystical labour. If we look for a balanced relation between the earthly and the spiritual things, and constantly gain this equilibrium we can work in love - as beings who virtuously think, act and want. By thinking the right thing, doing the right thing and wanting the right thing, we bring the human extremes nearer to each other. This intention is confirmed in the esoteric schools by solemn oaths, initiations, mental exercises and instructions. What associates us, is our joint pursuit of everything that is beautiful, noble and righteous.

57. Egrégoire

A mysterious and rarely discussed subject in the field of mysticism is the égrégoire. Important mystical principles seem to be beyond the scope of language when we want to describe them. Therefore we best try to deal with them indirectly. For that reason we shall describe the égrégoire by drawing comparisons. They can elucidate the word that is the representative of a high-minded principle. Even if it is a product of the human mind, it would not have been put into use if first we would not have had an idea of its contents and meaning and had not laid it down in a transferable term.

The word égrégoire has been called into being to represent a positive idea and to be a focus for the human concentration. This has the following background. It is intrinsic to the good that it has positive effects. By intrinsic the dictionary understands: 'closely connected' or 'inseparably connected with'. Positive results do not originate from obeying a higher expression of will as a reward, for reward is a human notion. The positive belongs of necessity to the sphere where it has been created. The cosmos does not work like a court of law that passes judgement afterwards on the basis of facts that have passed. In the cosmos results are entrenched in an existing order.

In our mystical study inherence is of importance because it can elucidate certain issues of the existence. Inherence can be found everywhere, with the laws of nature and with all manifestations that come into being as a result of them. We all know inherence from daily practice but sometimes it causes problems for our comprehension. Intuitively we sense certain truths, but it seems as if much around us seems to contradict these truths. We call doing well intrinsic to progress, and love intrinsic to understanding, but reality is more complex, for it sometimes looks as if it is just the other way round. Apparent exceptions to inferences are mainly connected with definitions of the points of departure, and with our ability to place manifestations in a broader perspective.

Inherence also stretches out as far as the personalities who live on this earth. Every kind of personality has intrinsic characteristics. A negative personality has all the aspects intrinsic to negativism. For the same reason a positive human being reflects the positive aspects. In the world regularly persons come to the fore who maintain a special contact with the spiritual plane and play a leading part in the development of mankind. These people - as we have seen - are called avatars. Intrinsic to an avatar is that he embodies the highest mystical principles that we can imagine. An avatar knows his position and his powers. He knows that he reveals and represents important cosmic principles. That he reveals himself as an avatar is intrinsic to that.

There are spheres that hierarchically are placed above the avatar. For him too apply laws of nature that he cannot change, like the fact that there are avatars, that the human body has a blood circulation and must be fed to be able to live. A temporary influencing of these laws does not discontinue them. They have been established at a higher level than at the level of the consciousness of the avatar. The avatar is a focus through which the light reaches the world, and because the light can only be perceived via a lightbearer the observants of that light often concentrate not only on the light, but on its bearer as well.

So far we have had a good introduction to penetrate to the very heart of the égrégoire. Let us give

thought to a symbol and consider it as the representation of the highest achievable insight. It is intrinsic to this kind of symbol that it can serve as a means to prime and stimulate mystical growth. When we attune to the core of the symbol, we get to something that lies farther or encompasses more than the symbol itself. It is the sphere of which it is a reflection and a limitation. What belongs to this sphere we can trace back to the symbol. With this it has become the bearer of the light. How this is visualized is not so important. A visualized image is not only a reflection but also, if it is powerful enough, a key to enter the sphere from which it comes. The deepest core of such a symbol is the *égrégoire*, of which there are many. Spiritually developed personalities are engrafted onto an *égrégoire* and are correlated with it. The mystic who attunes to it will be aware of the blessings of the *égrégoire*, which is the father and mother of the symbol as it were.

58. The will

As novices, who are hardly capable or not capable at all of directing their lives, we learn that certain exercises will enable us to control our physical vehicles. We are going to do those exercises, for years on end, maybe under supervision. This does not deprive us of our power of decision, but on the contrary helps us to receive energy in stead of losing it. During our first apprenticeship our frame has to get physically, mentally and spiritually geared to the new and renewing interferences to which it sees itself submitted rather unpreparedly. The three levels work together far from harmoniously, so that tempestuous tableaux may occur in our intellectual life, now that we try to let go the old roots, and try to build a new life. It is the opening to a change. We set to work and wait for things to come.

It is a radical process. We let go at our outer limitations and hardly know what we shall have to contend with, what kind of monsters we shall have to fight. All sorts of powers are activated to help the fighter find his way to the top. The path is not there yet. We make the path ourselves, stone by stone. On our way to controlling our weak nature we think that every step should already give us this control. But we are merely on our way; success is still a long time coming. While we are on our way we look around us and wonder alarmed why others, who do not exert themselves as we do, seem to gain everything so much easier. What use is it, we ask ourselves, to have a refined style of living and to develop our personality, if others just enjoy everything and cheerfully keep living on with it?

The answer lies in the satisfaction that this kind of struggle seems to give us. Every earthly pleasure remains accessible to us, but the methods that we follow will also render us other things. It is as if we have to follow a path that runs parallel to that of nonmystics a good length of time, and after this we go on alone. On certain stages our path still runs parallel to that of others. Even in the initial stage, when we seem to walk some of the way together with nonmystics, the outside world already criticizes inoffensive neophytes like us. We are attacked about the ethereal character of our work, for we cannot demonstrate what is changing in our world. If we do not make clear that our consciousness is part of that world also, criticism may become even bigger.

In our conscious effort we seem to be resisted by the forces that we try to find. We are confronted with the energy that we wish to control. Etched by the injuries that we suffer with this fight, marked by the small, drastic and lasting changes that have been burned into us, we continue on the path again. We would get too far of the subject if we should mention all the blows that we have to endure, or indicate what terrifying moments we know and what powers try to crush us. Nor do we have to relate how surprised our acquaintances are when they see how we, as humble but determined neophytes, work our way up to a sphere where our higher nature becomes visible. The world shakes to its foundations when a neophyte continues his way and lets himself not be frightened by anything. Little is in the same class as this or does measure up to it.

We have to climb further, keep our heart on the scales, burn for desire to be gathered in the great light. We are blessed with an interesting life, for during our journey through the mystical mountains, along the path that despite our exertion often runs into curves, we find treasures that mean more to us than can be explained. Does this mean that we are not earthly and mortal? No,

but already permeated by a nonearthly and immortal light that make us earthly and not earthly, mortal and not mortal, but certainly makes us initiates.

59. Assistance of others

The response to essential questions need not be in the shape of an inner sensation. It may come via somebody who gives us advice. The assistance of others can speed up our development or slow it down, influence it anyhow. Our progress is partly determined by others. It is not possible to get out of everybody's way and avoid their influence and opinions. It is not possible to meet other people without receiving in any way some impression. Sometimes it is on the surface, but sometimes it catches on. Not everybody leaves an impression that is as deep. Our reaction depends on the power and quality of the aura of the person with whom we get into touch. If we want to know if others have a useful effect on us we investigate whether they have a positive or negative radiance. If we meet someone who makes us feel insecure, afraid, restless, who pulls us down, stirs up the low and destructive in us, tries to obscure the light, then beware. Inwardly we know very well who we are dealing with. When people lift us up, stir up noble feelings in us, bring peace, give us the feeling that we are secure and safe, estimated at our value and stimulated, then we are in touch with the positive aura of a positive personality.

Somebody can always be found who is attuned to the light and helps us forward. We must not let our development slide however. An indiscriminate submission to third parties does not particularly lead to a favourable result. It is true that we too often expect that cosmic powers or people in our environment solve our problems. But they do not and cannot. One will appeal to family and friends for the relieving of immediate distress. When it is of such a nature that it keeps coming back as a lesson that has to be learned, we may hope that our helpers point out the causes to us in stead of taking care of the effects. There is no point in asking for help, getting this help and soon being up against the same shortcomings once more. Every power administered from outside as a panacea is doomed to disappear again with the lapse of time. Only the energy that we ourselves manage to generate and constantly produce will stay. An event from ordinary life can illustrate this.

A car with a weakened battery is started with the aid of cables that run from the accumulator of another car to the exhausted battery. If the owner of the weak accumulator would not recharge it short-term to stay under his own steam, the temporarily supplied energy would leak away and the problem would return before long. The characteristic of a good battery is that it is recharged during use and keeps its energy. We resemble the battery somehow. Of course we all are in a weak condition at times. Naturally we then will recharge with other people. But as soon as we are recharged we must pull out and with haste bring our energy up to standard from within.

In us, as mystical students, sometimes painful processes occur that weaken us. It are the hindrances that can be found on every mystical path. They wear us out so that we must be on the alert. If the difficulties increase so much that an overstrain threatens, then it is wise for us to enlist help. Let us consider however that the assistance of others is and must be temporary. We may try to find help but, better still, try to descry the laws that underlie a weakened system or an undesired condition. Discovering and learning to control these laws helps the body and mind to retain energy, to strengthen it and to direct it. Nonetheless it may be necessary that we let others remedy a temporary lack of energy.

Conversely people can appeal to us for help. When must we render it? That is difficult to answer. In the field of assistance our opinions often do not seem to match those of a higher

nature. We are sometimes ready to help somebody, but for any reason whatsoever the help does not catch on. It is not accepted or turns out different than we intended. Must the help that we had in mind be left to others in that case, or even not be given at all? But these are only our own little problems when we want to extend help. The person whom we want to help is faced with a completely different problem. He has the freedom to lead his life the way he wants and may turn down all offered assistance. We have to stand by and watch. Maybe the person who is in distress must learn to stand on his own feet. Our well-meant offer may have a restraining influence on his development, even on our own development.

A mystical assessment might help us to see things in perspective. The real art is that we stop thinking and let our higher self speak. Thus we are prepared to turn our eyes inside and to discover what wealth of knowledge is hidden there. This does not mean that we must be deaf to all other voices and have to brush aside all suggestions that come from the outside. The object is rather to let the outer counsel harmonize with the inside knowledge. They can be diametrically opposed, but by listening to our inner voice we can value knowledge that comes from the outside.

We cannot say in what shape an important lesson or advice will come on our path. Whatever comes from an authority we accept easier than what comes from an insignificant person, but help may come from insignificant quarters. Do not mind the appearance of the messenger. If we really intuit what it is all about in life, we do no longer care whether we get help from a beggar or a king. In daily conversation we hear many remarks that are food for contemplation. Someone's straightforward opinion about the situation in the world may nuance the view-point that we have, and help us along. We can also learn from what happens around us. Many people who are only concentrated on matter show a distinct uneasiness. They show that they are not satisfied with their lives. They are clearly seeking and do not know that they are only a few steps away from spiritual awakening. They only need a little bit of support to find the way inside. Meanwhile they can put in remarks that hit the mark; and also from this source we can learn a lot.

60. Adjustment

There is a cyclical movement in nature, in our personal life, even in businesslike activities. The periodicity to which everything is open sometimes keeps itself hidden, but we can learn to have an eye for it. Every development depends on fluctuations. Periodicity is the pulse of the universe that makes itself felt both in events and in the mind. We are submitted to several fluctuations. They counteract each other, complement each other, harmonize or disharmonize. We control our living conditions not so much by understanding how fluctuations exactly work, but rather by our notion that they work, and by our intuitive skill to make use of them. We can work with them without having to know why there are fluctuations and why they interact. That is less important to us. We learn by applying, by associating, by repeating and by attuning, and most of all by adapting. Thus we learn to be in harmony with the fluctuations that we study and that we seek alliance with.

When we are capable of intuiting the subtle fluctuations of an event we can try to bring ourselves in harmony with it. This does not imply that we let ourselves be carried along without a struggle. It can be compared with a journey across a river. We sail somewhere between the source and the delta. The stream that flows downwards from above symbolizes the whole of the cosmic forces. It will give us a lot of trouble to row against the stream. He who tries to do this is not in harmony with the natural course of events. If we know in what direction the water flows and let ourselves be carried, everything goes much easier. The direction that we sail in has been rather fixed, but we can navigate our vessel in such a way that it takes the desired tributaries.

So adjustment has a strong affinity with harmony. It is quite a task to learn to realize how we can adapt ourselves. For many people it is difficult to discover on what wavelength something is situated, so in what direction the river flows. It is a part of our study that we render account of every change in the wave-like motions that we know, so that we can adjust our ship on the cosmic stream. This means that we need not passively undergo periodicity. It is on the contrary a phenomenon that, on condition of being used well, leads to great and new things. When we swim with the tide we hardly have to try to grow mystically. Growth is a quality that the soul personality possesses of itself. We must learn to yield to this thought. Attunement is the only thing worth striving for. The rest will take care of itself.

In the human body we find a fine indication that this seems to tally. If our organs are subservient to their purpose (contributing to an optimally functioning personality) and harmonize with the universal laws, a good health in physical and psychical respect is the result. Separately the organs need not have a notion of the high purpose for which they have been put together. Adjustment, attunement and harmony are a vital necessity. They are key words within the esoteric school, where just like in the outside world divergent perceptions and expectations exist. The separate contribution of the pupils is as that of the organs within our human body. In their multiple of effects they form a varicoloured whole. By adjusting and attuning to the joint purpose harmony can be achieved if no other circumstances, for instance karmic conditions, thwart this.

The main laws are reflected in miniature. On all fronts we adapt. This already happens as soon as we learn our native language. Mastering a language is a matter of adjusting. The acoustic vibrations of the words approach us as sounds, but they have a meaning. We do not only receive

the sound of the words, but also learn to intuit what the meaning behind the words is. Between understanding what they mean and the ability to produce them ourselves lies a limited period of time, for our individual life wants to adapt as quickly as possible to that of others in the environment. We form a kind of communicating vessels as soon as we are fairly attuned to each other on both sides. We resemble transmitters and receivers. The one transmits significant signals and waits until the other is able to give a reaction at the same level, so that communication is feasible.

Adjustment has a fairly negative sound. Welfare work in the older days and psychiatry too aimed at bringing a person back into the group from which he had become alienated. The individual had to be adjusted and fitted in again. Whether he was entitled to an independent development was left out of consideration. In our time one rather pays attention to the personal and sometimes different functioning of man in his society. Nonetheless somebody who adjusts himself need not always wrong himself. It is important that we are fully alive to the reality of our environment. We can function thanks to our ability to adapt to this environment. We live in the middle of it and use its achievements. In short, we adjust ourselves while yet we keep following our own path. Our main adjustment, the going along with what nature and the higher self demand from us, can lead to harmony. This is an approach that bears many concessions, but even in its poorest form it still brings progress. A mystical fraternity or another community of people striving for a world that develops itself, asks for this adjustment.

Adapting has to do with passivity, although this is a different passivity than the one we usually think of when hearing that word. Here it is a passivity that takes the shape of the line of least resistance. That too is a notion of which we usually have a negative picture, but it is not the line of inertia. Neither is it the easiest way. The true mystical line of least resistance requires making an all-out effort. In life we can determine our attitude by opting for activity or passivity. Meditation shows us what the right kind of passivity is. A form of activity is concentration. We shall want to move the laws of nature and to combine them in the right manner. Subsequently we must use energy, after which we let everything go. We have nature work for us according to a blueprint.

If we want to change something consciously, our being must mobilize all powers required to achieve the desired result. In this situation there is talk of offering resistance, for we must restrain the laws of nature, and prevent their working in an undesired direction. On the other hand our wish to create something may arouse resistance with others, against which we oppose again. When we do this as a reed that at the beginning lets itself be bent by the storm and then springs up again as if nothing has happened, we have followed the line of least resistance. Some powers bear ill-will towards us by nature. We can and will arm ourselves against it. By not resisting in the higher sense of the word, we enter a centre where, just like with a hurricane, there is a serene stillness. Resistance may assume several shapes. The student who is endangered can actively change himself into a serene centre. But to the negative forces he may be like a storm that will tear them apart.

Where there is light, there is no room for darkness. When we are receptive as soon as we encounter positive powers and seclude ourselves hermetically for every opposite power, we are on our way to mastery of life. Our acting should be attuned to the demands of the moment and go no further than is becoming. On this point we can learn something from mechanics. Two

surfaces running over each other in a machine can be sharpened when they begin to run tight. If done well, that is if polished to a certain degree of accuracy, it produces an impeccable functioning. If one continues polishing to an exactness that is too high the matter gets jammed and the working of the machine is annulled. I Tjing says about the line of least resistance: "Every situation only becomes good if one is able to adapt to it and does not exhaust oneself through the wrong resistance." (Hexagram 17, Following.)

61. Intuition and peace

The inner voice that gives us advice - sometimes against all logic - is called intuition. Whether we hold on to that voice that tells us what to do does not only depend on the confidence that we have in it, but also on the degree to which the outside world tries to suppress this confidence. As convinced as we may be that intuition is a valuable human faculty: if the outside world puts pressure on us it is difficult to hold on to our conviction. Most of the time there is no insuperable difficulty in having to maintain an intuitive impression towards one person. If half the world rises against us things are different. The more resistance we experience, the more we have to make an appeal to our inner power. And this is very difficult to achieve, because we are left standing alone. We feel our self-confidence being undermined: is our intuitive impression really authentic? Is it an impression from the higher consciousness?

We can do two things with the incentives that we become aware of from within. Just perform the things that we are stimulated to do, without minding the effects, or sound out whether carrying out our inner commission brings peace or disquiet. But, is the feeling of peace or disquiet indicative for the authenticity of the impression that we receive? He who experiences grief, disquiet, opposition or despondency as the result of the acting that has been advised him inwardly, will ask himself if being attuned must always lead to inner peace and tranquillity of mind. The answer is alluring. If a behavioural impulse based on intuition is not accompanied by a peaceful feeling, we are inclined to think that our behaviour will not be in line with the laws of nature. Because we are familiar with a certain explanation of the word peace, we may think that following our inner voice should always have peace as its result.

There are circumstances where this seems not to hold. For is it not odd that we can be peaceful, whereas the acting that gives us peace has a totally different effect on the people in our environment or vice versa? Must we provide the notion 'peace' with a better definition, for instance in the field of upbringing? When parents with the best of intentions punish or reprimand their child they often do this with a bleeding heart. They interfere because it is in the interest of the child, have no selfish intentions and act with inner support. In spite of this they seem to lack a feeling of peace. On the contrary they experience pain and have the feeling of being punished themselves. How can this be explained? All things considered we can experience grief and inner peace at the same time, because obviously there are several kinds of both. The heartrending feeling when we have lost somebody who is very precious to us, differs very much from the disunity that we feel when we have grieved somebody and regret it. And the pain that we feel when grief is brought about somewhere, does not resemble the pain that haunts us when we have to impart an unpleasant lesson to somebody.

These emotions obviously are a phenomenon in many circumstances, and they can be rather unrelated to what from our deepest self induces us to act. Once we have been persuaded of the assent that our acting enjoys from within, we must continue our way self-assured. The way that we delineate is made more arduous by opposition and pain. It is a pain that would not be there had we chosen a different path, but there is no real choice between the one and the other possibility. The mystic does not choose the easiest way. If on the basis of the suggestions of the higher self we make a decision that has a positive effect on the well-being of many people, it is not impossible that the majority disagrees with us. The higher self may support us, but this does not necessarily mean that others will thank us for that. Maybe we have to endure the resistance

of large groups of people. There is no alternative however. Turning it round, through following a course of action that does not conform to the suggestions of the higher self we would feel guilty, even if the masses would support us. This is not satisfactory either.

Whatever decision we make, it may have consequences. Through this it becomes very important what we understand by inner peace, when making the decisions that we want to make. Obviously the common explanation of inner peace is insufficient. How else can we maintain that we do follow our inner voice and yet do not feel peaceful and at ease, which we should? The higher self, which supports and approves of our actions, inculcates images into us that are more important than the effect of our feelings and emotions. It simply tells us what to do. There comes an inner command and we know: this is how it must be done and this is how we are going to do it. There is no doubt whatsoever. This conviction speaks without any emotion, as an inner certainty, a true command from within.

In the awareness that we act attuned, we must accept the inevitable consequences which are evoked through this acting, for we have no better touchstone than the voice of the higher self. We must get accustomed to this thought. We must content ourselves with implementing the wishes of the higher self, even if apparently we do not experience peace when we undertake the implementation of those wishes. For at a high level we do experience peace. It is often the case that our insight is directly affected when we are informed better about the backgrounds of a situation that first we did not understand. It may make things more acceptable. When we meet with opposition, in the worst case we only see our fear or the lack of peace. We may lack the information that can counterbalance these feelings or make them understandable. Our firmness is put to the test. Let us not give up then, and think of the illustrious persons who can serve us as a model.

History shows that those people who gave the world the good and the beautiful and were receptive to inspiration, kept defending their case. That is how they have put humanity at a higher level and they can inspire us. Conversely it is not always obvious what the effect of inspired conduct will be on our adversaries, but when they get no impulses their not awakened mind remains dormant. When they get impulses with which they not agree they will offer resistance. Their mind stirs itself. It may feel compelled to go into the offensive. Although it may take a long time before the light breaks through in such a mind that feels provoked by everything that it cannot understand, eventually this light comes with the necessity of a law of nature. Our new visions do their work as catalysts. By just going about our business we transmute discontentment into inner rest. Insight in the laws of nature and in the demands of the inner consciousness decreases uneasiness in the world and for it gives tolerance and real peace.

"Beauty I love very much
yet never so profound
as when with a crown of thorns
it has been duly crowned."

Angelus Silesius

62. Repetition

One principle known in alchemy and in mysticism seems to go against a number of rules known by man for causing changes. It is the principle of the repetition of an apparently not effective method. On the whole the alchemists can be divided into three groups. We have the alchemist who keeps himself engaged with the transmutation of physical elements. Then there is the transcendental alchemist, who aims at transforming elements in the human character. Finally there is the alchemist who works on both terrains, or better: who combines both terrains. The alchemists can make use of a static method (repeating the same procedure continually), or a dynamic method (choosing a different procedure all the time). Each of both methods though, consists of a range of steps.

There are alchemists who start from the assumption that following one mode of operation determines how their goal can be attained. When they are enlightened they know which mode this is. Other alchemists are of the opinion that there are more procedures for their purpose. These alchemists too must be enlightened to reach their goal. In principle every alchemical procedure that is fundamentally related to the required aim is useful, providing that the right connections are found. For that the alchemist must see these connections. If he will not become enlightened inwardly, he will meet with insoluble problems when applying his methods.

When the alchemist starts with a certain craft he shall want to see the link between means and purpose. Then he chooses the procedure that brings him to his objective. Knowledge determines whether he is successful. People may have the impression that in his psychic laboratory he is busy in a completely psychical manner. But this one-sidedness would not be sufficient for a perfect balance between mind and matter, and for the alchemist who is aimed both materially and transcendently it is with certainty insufficient. Therefore he is at work twofoldly. Sometimes he uses this cleverly to conceal the true nature of his work for the outside world. One seldom sees the main aspects of the alchemist: his mainsprings and enthusiasm, his background or what inspires him. In his work he uses principles of balance and repetition. To get to his objective he has to formulate a starting point, a method and a destination. These three elements belong to each other.

A method supposes a process leading from one phase to another. If the alchemist changes procedures in each case and does not know the affinity between procedure and target, he will have to conduct such a big number of experiments that his life is not long enough to investigate even the smallest fraction of possibilities. With every chosen procedure he has to know from the start whether he sees the right connection between procedure and objective. Otherwise his work will be in vain.

There is a magical link that connects procedure and objective. If a substance cannot be transformed into another substance through the application of a certain method, the method can be changed to the extent that a result is acquired. If one method fails, another method is taken. If the second method fails, method three is taken and so on. In such a case it is considered superfluous or strange to apply the same procedure time and again when it has led to failure the first time. The same test will be repeated only when procedural mistakes are suspected or when the registration of the development phases has been negligent. And yet this is exactly what alchemists and mystics often do: the moment that we expect them to have one method followed

by the other, they repeat the method already used. And where in our opinion they could continue to use the same method, they switch from one method to another.

With repeating actions that seem useless when looked at in their isolated state results can be achieved. For instance, the repeated hammering on an object makes it change its form, place or nature. When we repeat a well-known operation, such as the hammering on a stone to split it, we accept that there is no result the first time. We take into account that the isolated deeds conceal their effect for our sensory perception and in the long run may indeed lead to a change.

The esoteric science knows this principle and puts it into practice. When we use a hammer to hit a stone in the right fashion protractedly, the stone will burst with the passage of time and then break. Maybe we must hit a hundred times, maybe a thousand times, but the moment will come that the stone gives way. We are not surprised when somebody wants to break a stone by hitting it long, for we know the result. When working with a hammer we see strokes, interrupted by allegedly empty intervals: the moments that the hammer is lifted and comes down again. The intermissions between the strokes seem to have no bearing on the stone, but the stillness between the hammer-strokes is part of the whole method. The accumulation of strokes finally gives the intended result. When someone else wants to achieve the same result by laying the stone in a fire we will not be surprised either. In a fire the stone remains lying without interruption. It seems to affect the stone incessantly and we know that in the stone there is a continuous reaction to what happens on its surface. In both cases time is a factor. The effect of the first hammer-stroke is coupled to the effect of the second stroke, just like the first second in which the fire affects the stone is coupled to the second second.

The same happens in our being. The transcendental alchemists get us methods that are necessary for the transmutation, and for the purifying of our inner self. On the other hand they show us that some methods must be repeated. The succession of repetitions provides the change that we want to carry through. We notice that the embroidering on one technique or method, just like switching each time to something else, causes changes, but only to our advantage if we know exactly which method to apply for which purpose. Maybe we discover that it matters less which technique we use, than that we keep our inner flywheel going vigorously. If we stop the exertion of power on the flywheel it begins to turn slower. Then it must get a substantial push after which everything starts all over again.

It is a peculiar process. Our mental state changes ceaselessly, and we grow towards mastery of life, even if after countless attempts to transmute ourselves we have sensed no change. A hundred times, maybe a thousand times we shall have to use a method, and suddenly, as the result of a law of nature, everything will break through. Through repetition we grow to mastery. Repetition which is no repetition. The gold becomes purer by melting the crude ore in the fire, and it takes a while before we are able to separate the ore from the cinders. We transmute the lower self and come to new life.

As students on the mystical path we discover that we walk a circular, repetitive course. When we take heed of this, it looks as if we are at a complete standstill. The way seems to return to a point of departure continuously, like when we repeat beating a motionless stone. Fortunately for us this is the case, for this method leads us to our goal. When we leave a point of departure, for instance when we travel to another city, we move in a cycle. After we have executed our plans

far from home, we return. We have completed a cycle but return changed. Because of this, our own city makes a different impression than when we left it. The effect increases if there is more time between departure and return.

A similar phenomenon occurs when we find ourselves in a company that will keep together for a number of hours. We move from one person to another, keep talking here and there and walk to somebody else again. If we remember what impression the participants made on us when we entered the room and what impression we have at the end of the meeting, we notice a considerable difference between them. Even if we do not leave the spot that we have occupied we see our perception change. Whether we remain in our place or go elsewhere, changes take place time and again which leave an impression on our mind.

If we as travellers on the mystical path do not drastically change our life, we shall yet observe a change with everything that we do, even if we do it in the old manner. For nothing remains really the same. When we change our mode of thought we end up in old patterns after a while, or are confronted once more with view-points that we thought we had abolished. Sometimes they are very remote from us already. We look at them as if we were outsiders and continue our way. Sometimes they are alive and kicking and we notice the difference between our present line of thinking and that of the olden days. We can decide if we want to bring in again the rejected pattern of living - changed, improved -, or if we want to part with it once more, on a better basis this time.

The mystical circular course of which this is an example, is universal. We travel as if we are lost in the desert. As travellers who have lost our way we constantly return to our point of departure. We walk in a circle, but the circle that the mystic walks, is of vital importance. We not only learn to go through old situations with all the knowledge that we have gained on our journey, but we also get new chances if the old ones were blown away by us. It may discourage to return into the same situations all the time, but it may also give hope. We can handle the new and at the same time old situation with more experience, wisdom and knowledge and with more understanding and satisfaction. It enables us to help our fellow seekers who have arrived at the same point. We may have passed that point a hundred times.

Letting others benefit from our experience, does this not make our life worth living? A guide who leads others through inhospitable areas has walked this terrain innumerable times. He has made a special study of the route and especially of the hidden and dangerous spots. Every time he exercises the same caution as the ones he leads, but is now able to mind the abysses as well as direct those who pass them for the first time. It is a circular course. The guide walks the same path countless times but learns so much more from it, that he becomes a better guide for the ones that he leads. Among them are the guides of tomorrow.

63. Humour en seriousness

Two notions full of consequence are humour and seriousness. They can be found within the human character side by side. There is room for both. In the theatre the public is approached with tragedies and comedies. They appeal to the human need to laugh and to cry. Humour and seriousness both have a positive and a negative equivalent. Their effect can be measured by the manner that our system responds to it. It is brought to rest by humour or hurt by it. Through seriousness poignancy or gloominess is called up. Seriousness touches very different chords than humour does. There is a detrimental and pernicious humour that does not match an aesthetically inclined personality. This humour evokes feelings of shame for him who is allergic to it. There is also a sophisticated humour, which is as a soft oil for our system that sometimes has got locked for a while. The first kind of humour has rough vibrations and degrades a human being. The other gives warmth and gladness. It is a step forward to inner peace.

Seriousness also knows two shapes. There is the so-called deadly seriousness. Something that typifies the scientists who day in day out work on pernicious inventions. It is a seriousness synonymous with grimness. It makes people harsh, empty and cold-hearted. But we also have the seriousness of a student who is full of awe, and elevated in mystical contemplation. Or the seriousness of an artist who works on the elaboration of a beautiful creative thought. And above all let us not forget the seriousness of a child immersed in its play. Such a seriousness and veneration are a whole, full of warmth and gladness, and in it they are deeply related to humour.

When the right forms of humour and seriousness are expressed we feel fine. There are many human capacities that come to light in a pleasant manner, and there are the conducts that are off plumb and cause damage. Humour and seriousness are two important human expressions of conduct, but they can both go off the rails. We intuitively know what is decent, but somebody else may have a different perception of it. That depends on our aesthetical and ethical development. A balance is needed and it comes into being when the demands of the outer self and the inner self are balanced. To know how these demands must be phrased requires a deep knowledge of our own nature.

64. The city

He who has ever been in a metropolis may have been inundated by impressions. A big city has an impressive effluvium, especially if we imagine being on a territory where millions of people live together and are occupied with their personal development. This is still more tangible when it is dark. Of all those people there are a few who are attuned to the inner realms, through which they receive the power to guide their fellow men in the city as parents do their children. For these initiates the city is nothing but a meeting place of the family. They think in great proportions and feel that the borderline between the cosmos and the earth is vague. The big cities are an instrument of the collective unconscious. Take a city like Paris that calls up romantic feelings with many people in the world. That is the soul of this city. It is not merely a place where a few million people work, or have a house standing, but it is also a living organism with its own aura.

A city serves the awakening of man. Good and evil combine in it. For the mystic and romantic it conceals quite different secrets than for the international drugs dealer. Many millions of years ago our cities have looked quite differently. There was only scenic beauty, where no house could be detected. Nothing to be found of the mysteries that take place in the deepest secrecy of a metropole. There were no human beings. Nature struck violently. Hail and rain, storm, lightning; on spots where many people would be accommodated later. The towns were in the process of formation. The earth had still to become the residence where people could gain an endless flood of experiences, where there would be laughter and crying, loving and hating, where creative minds would build and tear down, and above all where soul personalities would find a way to attune to a sphere that again would raise them from the earth.

During the past centuries the big cities have been vital links in man's quest for knowledge. Many scientists of worldwide renown have had their education there. Who of them would have given a moment's thought to the prehistoric spectacle that the ground beneath his feet once presented? How different life would have looked if the cities would not have been built above the ground but underneath it, while nature above the ground remained unspoilt. Man has great control over how he will shape his surroundings and how the town and its environment reflect the human aura. A city is more than the sum of its parts. It consists of more than houses, people, animals, plants and streets. It is suffused with the spirit of the population that lives there. A town is charged by its inhabitants and vice versa. It has a radiance of its own, a 'town spirit', which is the addition of structures which apparently are not connected.

If these days we sit in an easy armchair and ponder on this, we can hardly imagine how we have come such a long way to reach our present style of living. The big city is the place where the level of our material accomplishment is revealed. But there is yet another city, which is invisible. The transition from the earthly town to this impressive cosmic town is great. It is indeed a part of ourselves, but just because it is so near it is difficult to find. In the spiritual city everything is light, contrary to the city that we see objectively and that is filled with dangers and uncertainties. In the cosmic city we are safe and at home. As a common house offers protection to the family and is a junction of the town itself, thus the cosmic city also has its junctions from which a connection is maintained with the world. The combined intellects which via their ideals unite on invisible soil, build a heavenly metropole of great beauty and radiance. From there there is a similar ruling as from the earthly cities. Their organization, background and effect

however is totally different.

65. Secrecy

When the old mystics could not yet exhibit their apprenticeship unpunished, they took precautions. One of them was, never to seem what one is and never to be what one seems. In a work about the philosopher's stone (Sincerus Renatus - 1710) we find some rules for it: '12: "When the Magisterium will be communicated to a brother, he must pledge towards God not to make use of it, neither for himself, nor to cause one or other kingdom to revolt, nor to serve a tyrant, but he should say that he does not know the magisterium and that it is a hoax." And: '40: "When a Brother comes into contact with someone else, he must say that he is a newcomer."' Similar incentives have also been found in other writings.

Even in times that no bodily harm threatens, mystics are not the ones that they seem. They live like ordinary people but their ideals and objectives are aimed at the inner self. They can be in someone's environment for years and years without the other person even having the slightest idea what work they occupy themselves with. Normally this plays into the mystic's hand. Just like in the old days operating in secret is particularly opportune to us. In silence we can study undisturbed and develop ourselves. A sphere of action that is not watched guarantees us the entrance to all social ranks, without people stigmatizing us as odd customers. In short, we are accepted as the normal human beings that we are, while we can draw on sources which are interesting or accessible for few others.

This brings us into a strange condition. We must manage to familiarize ourselves with abiding at two levels, for we have our profane duties, as well as activities that are only recognizable for fellow seekers. In the outside world we sometimes behave as the opposite of a mystic, at least if we look at the way how the average person defines a mystic: as a relic of days long gone; an outdated creature, living introvertedly, unworldly. But we know best what we are. We are not unworldly but discover other levels of awareness. No hallucinatory spheres but places that we recognize as our homes and where only kindred spirits will set foot. Perhaps it is good to devote a word to those who take the view that drugs can offer them the same experiences. The answer to it can be brief and to the point. Whoever is unprepared will not be admitted to the realm of spiritual light. He cannot possibly find the entrance. He who is not totally prepared is not empowered.

If we cannot be recognized on the basis of a normal definition, it is not seldom the result of our conscious effort. We try to interlace our outer and inner life very naturally. The outside world cannot see in our heart and knows only little of the spheres that we explore. If someone sees our external activities, maybe he intuitively perceives the inner world that lies behind them. Our behaviour will not clash with our nature, for we can act in many different ways without having our nature suffer. When we as mystical students do not intend to comply with the role that has been prescribed to us, of the elderly, inward-looking eccentric, and prove ourselves to be happy, energetic and vital, it does not mean that we do not understand mystical life. On the contrary.

The mystic, as far as an image can be pictured of him, has his feet firmly on the ground. He intuitively joy and grief equally strong. He is a citizen of two worlds and knows both. He lets his outer life be guided by his higher self. His course is upward to the light, but he works both in the world and on the nonearthly plane. He acts according to his ability and is guided by the demands of the moment. If seriousness is asked of him, he is serious. If he should be light-hearted, he will

be so. Not as a weathercock that turns with all winds, but as somebody who knows when the time has come to adapt, or to go along with worldly demands. But also as somebody who, as soon as his inner self demands it of him, goes right against something and will say "no" when the whole world says "yes" or vice versa. He keeps his motives a secret if necessary. Naturally an outsider who has no idea what is happening will wonder what is going on.

There are several reasons to make our style of living not widely known and to surround our work with a certain confidentiality. It is of importance to recognize that the word 'secrecy' may encounter opposition. Some people are allergic to secret affairs for all kinds of reasons and link them to secretiveness and limitation of freedom. What aspects of the mystical work does secrecy relate to, what is its purpose, which liberties do we have and which not? In the professional field and in our spare time we regularly have to deal with forms of secrecy. Friends tell us in confidence what they are engaged in, and because they do not want us to discuss those matters with all and sundry they make an appeal to our secrecy and our silence. We fully understand this, and hope on occasion to find a ready ear ourselves, without everything immediately being passed on.

Another kind of secrecy we find in business communities. When we enter the board meeting of any company with the intention to find out what is discussed there, we will be removed without delay. Not because that which we might hear discussed is so secret, but because we lack the required authority to enter, and because we are no member of the board. Every right-minded human will admit that the board is fully entitled to meet amongst themselves, in secret therefore. That is the privilege of those who belong to the board. This precludes disquiet, excludes outsiders who might misinterpret what has been discussed, and creates the scope within which a free exchange of ideas becomes possible.

For the same reason some mystics assemble in private meetings. Within the mystical work certain measures are the product of a well-considered strategy. They take human nature into account. Because we strive for an equilibrium between the material and the spiritual life, we try to gain insight into the laws which govern the world and the mind. When we devote ourselves to the deeper truths of life it changes much in our psyche. It requires an environment in which everything that is developed in a psychical sphere has the opportunity to ripen. This is difficult amidst our daily routine and is much more successful in the fraternal and private cooperation with fellow seekers. An outsider who wants to share the same privileges must show that he can peg himself down. This will appear to be a subtle transfer of his freedom rather than a restriction.

With our fellow students we are part of a group that seeks harmony and wants to disseminate it in an ethically high-principled way. In this group we are assimilated as in a protective circle. With complete abandon we devote ourselves to the work in our spiritual laboratory. Privacy is advisable. Nobody will grant a layman in the field of chemistry access to a laboratory and encourage him to haphazardly mix all kinds of chemicals in anticipation of things to come. It may turn out well, but there may also follow an explosion. A prospective chemist first has theory lessons, then gets to know the safety provisions of the laboratory and only then gets permission to check his knowledge in actual practice. It goes without saying that an outsider is kept from the room. For him it is 'secret' territory. The instructors can do no more than pointing out to the applicant the risks that he exposes himself and others to, when he does not act upon

the suggestions that have been developed in practice. The student keeps the liberty to deviate from the standards imparted to him. It may lead to his being denied access to the laboratory.

It goes for most disciplines that the incompetent employing of means or tools may lead to accidents. Is there any reason to suppose that it will be different in the psychical field? When we undergo mystical training and are not aware of the necessity of feeding our mind inch by inch with new principles it may lead to accidents. No training whatsoever, certainly not that of the human mind, can succeed without the new knowledge being imparted in peace and quiet, if so desired in privacy with kindred spirits.

It is well-known that sciences like psychology and educational theory lead to destructive results when they are applied by malevolent people. Manipulation and failure are within arm's reach when one knows how the human mind reacts. The same goes within mysticism. We do not only change ourselves, but shall also be able to change our environment when we possess insight and control our abilities. Education and ethical formation therefore go hand in hand. This is another reason why mystical instruction should be kept private, for intensive tuition in a small circle offers good possibilities to exchange experiences and to compare ethical points of view. To conclude, the tuition strongly appeals to our deeper feelings and indirectly also to our sense of romance. Therefore in a fraternity there is a constant endeavour to create an atmosphere in which the natural need for knowledge and insight is cultivated. The privacy of the work forms a psychological aid, which continually drums into us the importance of our mystical study that we carry out with ups and downs, together with others with whom we form a sacred circle.

66. Competition

At the root of human endeavour lies struggle, which sometimes assumes the shape of competition. War, science, art and even the striving after peace originate from it. Many a person sees it as his task to establish peace somewhere and wants to be credited with the success of his attempts. He will want to lie ahead of other people's endeavour to sign the peace treaty, and wants to write history with it. Competition is connected with struggle, but struggle need not always mean war, nor is always something negative at stake. Competition is a phenomenon of the human interaction. But may the aim sanctify the means? Must we be glad that conflicts are terminated by means of competition? Or do we rather wish to be spared the progress that has come into being that way? Is competition a cultural phenomenon, in other words a product of the human mind, or is it inherent in nature?

If competition is at the root of natural processes, then the human competition product is perhaps not at all an isolated result of human brainwork and rather a logic affiliation to what we see elsewhere in nature. Provided that we specify competition as the aspiration of something to keep the position that it is in, together with its natural tendency to expand within its limits. The atom for instance finds itself in a particular orbit and will resist all possible influences that want to push it out of its trajectory. When the atom gives in to all the influences in its environment the universe becomes a chaos. There is a level where the means that the atom by nature possesses are no longer adequate to compensate the exterior pressure. The same goes for the cells in our body, in a way: they divide, have their own metabolism and carry out their natural task. When they are not thwarted in their striving to be themselves they continue to fulfil their task. They do neither more nor less. Even when nothing is put in their way they constantly preserve defensive works, because disintegration will be the effect when these are lacking.

This phenomenon, which can be regarded as a totally neutral aspect of existence, only gets allotted a quality as soon as it is analysed by the human mind. A cell puts itself no philosophical questions, for instance about the role that it fulfils in an organism. But when we perceive the activity of the cell under a microscope and become impressed by that little, living particle that so imperturbably and in perfect harmony with itself does its job, we see a resemblance with the processes in human society. Therefore we are inclined to give the processes that we observe in the cell, an analogous qualification. For in the cell we see the same activity as in society. There we call it - depending on its positive or negative nature - assertiveness, using one's elbows, strength of character, being on the make, perseverance, egocentricity, competition, sportsmanship or machismo.

Such an associative interpreting comes into being because at all levels we want to establish criterions when we judge expressions, achievements and behaviour. It is difficult to be reasonable with this, because our interpretation partly depends on our opinion about good and evil. He who wants to change the world by taking a place in an environmental commission, will want to reach his goals by eliminating his adversaries or fighting wrong conceptions. And a hardboiled businessman goes out for his own fortune, with elimination of all the powers that stand in the way. Therefore he can bear no other businessman near him who is active in the same field, because their goals clash. The success of the one thing must necessarily mean the downfall or the keeping in check of the other. Although the businessman just like the environmental devotee strives after his own purpose and wants to be himself in it, their pursuit has a

different effect on their environment.

If people pursue a purpose, it cannot always be seen if this is positive or negative. Therefore it must first be placed in a wider context, so that the bigger implications become clear. When somebody is in harmony with a striving that cannot be disconnected from himself, it does not mean that it is therefore inherently good. He can be disharmonic in relation to the cosmos or in relation to his environment. Our moral level determines if and when we consider competition blameworthy or positive. There is no objective criterion that can indicate what is right or wrong. For that, there are too many factors that are dependent on a personal interpretation. It is certain that the world will change both with and without competition. Whether a change is an improvement, again depends on our vision.

67. The mystical experiment

One can become proficient in the mystical style of living by studying, reading the works of other mystics, or by carrying on conversations with kindred spirits and through establishing by experiment what was learned. Through testing it in a daily situation we try it out. The results can be noticeable at once or take more time. That which does not instantly lead to results must be tested again, till we are sure that the principles are correct and that we control them. It is no haphazard search for confirmation of what we have learned. Methodology enters into the matter. It becomes a kind of laboratory arrangement on the spiritual plane. In a laboratory experiments take place. This calls up associations with chemical operations, with a spectacular claptrap. Therefore it should make us somewhat hesitant to talk about psychical experiments in stead of psychical exercises. A mystical exercise might be the acquiring of attunement to the higher self, through which our life becomes more harmonious. This is why the notion 'exercise' seems to be preferable to the notion 'experiment'.

Exercising is the repeated trouble that we take to obtain a skill, an effort aimed at result in the long term. It tests the instruments which are there, to see whether they have the anticipated effect. What the mystic calls exercises can be subdivided into three groups. There are exercises that can be executed every day, like concentrating, which is the bringing into action of mind power. This is aimed at activating our powers of observation, by improving and stimulating the functioning of organs and glandular system. Then there are exercises which are intended to neutralize physical complaints. They are only executed when illnesses or symptoms occur with ourselves or with others who want to be helped. An important third group are the exercises that are aimed at attuning to higher spheres.

All these exercises together reinforce our inner powers. Nobody can foresee when our skills become applicable. An exercise is as its name implies: the preparation for a putting into practice. Application fails if exercise has not preceded it. Exercises are the one pillar of our mystical training. The other pillar is studying the laws involved. For some the latter may seem an unimportant matter, but the beauty of the mystical labour is double. Of course we derive pleasure from controlling a certain field through direct experience, but the intellectually assimilating of the principles involved is pleasant too. If we are not instructed from the outside or from within about the law of attraction and repulsion, the law of action and passivity, the law of giving and taking, can we then see our exercises in the proper perspective? Without the instruction can we get around to fully understanding what occupies us?

The beauty of the cosmic reveals itself in the functioning of the laws of nature, and when we understand them they enlighten the way we live with them. There is much that appeals to us and increases our life immensely. The beauty of nature broadens the mind. It is the gate to illumination and we bring it out through exercise.

68. Does man go too far?

The way we perceive the world and draw conclusions from it, makes us call its phenomena beautiful or ugly, art or kitsch, easy or difficult, enlightened or not enlightened, intelligent or simple, exceptional or trivial, good or bad. From a number of alternatives we constantly choose the things that match our point of view. We want to go through life with what we have chosen and we gear our every movement to it. Therefore, to assess whether life runs the way we would like it to and whether we do not go too far in that, we constantly examine if our experiences of life are consistent with our choices. If we want to judge success or failure by anything, we necessarily do this by our points of departure. A wrong angle gives a wrong judgement. Life is risky when we cannot determine if our impressions are right, for then rectifying the mistakes that we have made, only produces new mistakes. From this fallibility we reach reflection, and this reflection sometimes leads us to the stand that as human beings we go too far. By this we can understand that we live unnatural and no longer are in harmony with nature.

Most people hold a view on what is wrong in the world. We only have to open out the newspaper and our opinions are coming through already. Although the answer to the question if man goes too far is determined by individual human beings, it appears that social standardization is not left to the individual. There are all sorts of mechanisms that form a mirror or an extract of what is generally considered reasonable. Through the centuries legislation has been adapted to the common idea about law and justice. Therefore it always runs behind social developments. Are we as individuals also running behind the developments? We probably do, because our opinions adapt to the developments that others initiate, and what we considered as going too far in the older days, we look at with different eyes now. The reverse is also found. The standard for what is acceptable differs from country to country, from nation to nation, from century to century, from person to person, and even within the individual the standard shifts from time to time. Now, who determines what is allowed, for whom?

We test our behaviour against that of others, and others do the same in relation to us. We are each other's measurements. How comes that we do not get stuck in a circle of opinions that keep confirming each other, and that on the contrary we seem to come to a certain evolution? Perhaps because the changes are regulated by laws that we can only partly influence and which ask of us an inner adaptation necessary to survive. In all epochs, so on all levels of development and civilization, human behaviour has been the subject of criticism. This is still true in our times. The view that man goes too far, is old too: in justice, in biology, in the arts, in chemistry, in medicine, in physics, in economy, in social life, in the media, in politics, in theology, in music.

Man often goes too far indeed. Only a few people will disagree on that. But the easy acceptance of this conclusion also carries a risk. Not one pronouncement about the acceptability of human behaviour can be tested exclusively against the ideas of the individual. Nor does the fact that a large group of individuals agrees on something guarantee that a taken position is correct. How can we solve the dilemma of having to choose between what goes too far and what does not - in fact the choice between right and wrong - when we have no universal standards? Do we not need a standard to know what we can do, what we are allowed to do and if we may call others to account for what they do? When somebody commits a crime and states that he considers his deed to be a completely sensible choice, will society accept this because his personal conscience has authorized his deed? It is doubtful. Every man goes his own way, the way that he knows and

recognizes as the right one. His choices however have consequences, depending on time and place. Most of the time he cannot run away from these consequences. Within the norms that society has imposed upon itself every deed has a punishable or nonpunishable consequence.

We want to make a distinction between what is true and false, in every sphere. How can we approach this? Let us once more take a close look at the question whether man goes too far. Usually we concentrate on the operative aspect of this question and not on the one who acts. The judgement whether man is going too far is concentrated on his behaviour, which is only one of his aspects. But what he is, should also be taken into consideration. How can we assess whether man goes too far when we do not establish who he really is? To put it differently: what 'too far' is, is beside the point, but what 'a human' is, is not. It is logical that when we attempt to investigate if something goes too far, i.e. goes beyond its limits, we first try to answer what its natural limitations are. We must try to find out if certain behaviour is inherently alien to man, or part of his possibilities. Once these haven been described we must distinguish if we are allowed to use them without any standard. When this question must be answered in the negative we must find out who may lay down the standard from which the use of the human possibilities must be judged.

This is no simple matter. Yet we establish standards for ourselves every day. It is a matter of protecting ourselves. According to many old philosophies we are as a material phenomenon a frame for a soul principle. This vital force uses our material frame as its vehicle. Depending on our attunement to a higher or lower sphere, we become the instrument of that sphere. An instrument for the better or an instrument for the worse. As a consequence of the fact that our physical being is a vehicle for the soul principle, we must maintain this vehicle in a good condition. From the oldest times we try this.

When we have nothing to eat, we go hunting. When we injure ourselves, we bind up our wounds. As time progresses our needs change but also the instruments with which we fill them. When dental surgery was still in its infancy a patient could die of a common inflammation of the jaw. Nowadays a root treatment follows and his life is saved. Man invented all kinds of aids to keep his body intact. All medical actions (operations, vaccinations) and aids (dental fillings, replacements, artificial hearts), lead to this. In that respect we seldom think we go too far. We install a good heating system in our house so that we will not die with the cold in the winter. When we have fallen in the street we get a tetanus injection in order not to contract a deadly disease. In certain cases we can die of blood poisoning or gangrene if we do not intervene. So we do intervene. To what extent?

It is fine with most people that medical science does intervene so much in the natural life processes. Even eating is a means to preserve the organism, but can we call this intervening in natural processes; is it artificial and wrong? Spudding up weeds is an introduction to crop improvement, to biological manipulation. It makes our vehicle survive. But the one leads to the other. For by cultivating agriculture we get better food. Through this intervening in nature we live longer. Living longer means reaching an age where geriatric illnesses may become manifest. When this is the case we intervene again, on the level of the geriatric complaints. So every intervention is linked to a new one irreversibly. When scientific developments progress we will find and apply other means to stay alive. These days we can reach an advanced age, whereas our vehicle since long has threatened to burn out. Medical science can prolong life, but

cannot offer a life in which our body is entirely employable to the last moment.

Those who are familiar with the old mystical philosophies, are familiar with the concept that dying is nothing but the abandoning of a material vehicle that can no longer serve. The question whether we as human beings go too far is therefore in a complex way linked with the state of our awareness, with the role that we attribute to our body, and with the philosophies that our mind has made itself familiar with. Whether we go too far at a moral level depends on our point of view. We intervene in all aspects of life and change our needs and objectives, with which we are guided by the evolution of our consciousness. Does man never exceed his limits then? In the last resort this is for us to decide, but we will have to face the consequences of every deed. According to the mystical philosophy we go too far when we act inconsistent with the promptings of the higher self, and when we do anything to which we are not fitted by nature. But we never go too far for what is right.

69. Karma

Does life contain a lesson that we have to learn? Or is life just as it is, and is the notion of this the lesson that we can learn? In other words: does existence have a higher meaning, is it guided by the gods, or are there other phenomena in the universe that direct the existence? Are it perhaps impersonal laws of nature that govern us, or does life unfurl itself as it presents itself to us and is it not guided by higher powers or forces at all. The answer to this as we manage to formulate it for ourselves, will deeply encroach on our lives. It is very determining for our attitude in life. For it determines whether we are passive and leave everything to the powers that be or to fate, or are induced by it to deploy our willpower and either assist the several guiding forces or bend them to our will. When we think that everything just happens to us, a fatalistic attitude can be the result. For some this perhaps is the best way to live their lives, when by nature they do not like to strain themselves to give their lives a direction: if everything is arranged for you, why then should you worry. Fatalism thus in an unexpected way becomes a counterpart of the mystical meditative attitude, in which the mystic yields to the guidance that he receives from within. Not really a counterpart, because the mystic, after having concluded his meditation, will go to work indeed, on the basis of the promptings of his higher self that shows him a direction that he can take. A fatalist will then call it a day.

If we want to walk a mystic path and are very objective, we shall try to find a path that meets all that logic requires from us: a path that we consider to be the voice of truth from within. Many of the most important matters in life do not make it easy for us to be objective. We must possess a great self-knowledge to disentangle how everything in reality is, apart from our wishes regarding how we would like to see that things are put together. What could in this case be a motive that obfuscates our judgment? To put it differently: could there be a preconceived position in our thinking that hinders us from freshly looking at the truth, at reality? What deep desires can unwittingly steer our seeking, into the direction that is right against the road to a correct answer? We can mention one, although more can be devised certainly. One deep desire we all have in common and that is, that we want to take our destiny into our own hands, no matter whether we take the view that it is determined by the gods or by the laws of nature. The desire to have a grip on the lives that we live, on the circumstances in which we have to be daily, and on the future, is innate. It is an elementary, primitive desire to maintain ourselves without limitations, and to be. How does this wish relate to the one or the other point of view, in other words, if we want to arrange our lives ourselves, what then does this mean for somebody who assumes that everything is directed from on high; and what does it contain for somebody who holds the laws of nature responsible for the existing things; or for the one who thinks that there are no governing forces at all? Finally, what does it mean for somebody who advocates the essentially mystical standpoint that man within several limitations can shape his own existence?

Suppose we are of the opinion that the gods steer our lives, would it have to lead to total passivity? The followers of many philosophies of life show, that not everybody absolutely submits to the will of a higher authority. They seem to put limits themselves to the idea that all life is arranged for them from on high. They seldom will sit and wait with their arms folded till their daily necessities fall from the sky. Exertion is needed for obtaining the most elementary things, and no matter how passive some people may be, or how much they may be of the opinion that all the earthly things are determined by the supernatural, there is always some field in which these people are working and this they do without giving it a moment's thought. They dress in

the morning, eat their breakfast, go to their work or plan their day any other way. All these activities are aimed at keeping their physical and mental being active and functioning. Even those mystics who have fully surrendered to a higher power, which they have shared with us in their writings, have been working in many respects. They were active in the world or stayed in a monastery, but in both cases their timetable was determined by the tasks that were imposed on them. If their opinion that everything is arranged by the higher powers would have been absolute, it could not be explained well why they kept being active themselves. In all these lives it is visible that the influence of the higher things is limited, that is, these lives exerted and wanted to exert part of that influence themselves, possibly starting from the attitude that they did this on behalf of the godhead.

Now let us take a look at the human being who takes it that it are the laws of nature that thrive him, and that he can influence them. He is the one who thinks that he himself can take the helm. There are many mystical pupils who deem this impersonal relation between man and cosmos to be the most logical and practical one. When it are the laws of nature that rule existence as we know it, it is of major importance to gain such a knowledge of them that we can influence them. For, an increase in knowledge will then give a better control over the laws and lead to an existence more in line with what we imagine of it. It seems to be obvious that one would imagine a universe in which the laws of nature govern and not the gods, and yet this is not the way man acts. Through their upbringing in the religious field many people do not even get round to such an analysis.

So, there also is a group of human beings who consider the gods to be the thriving force. The wish to direct our lives, if need be against the will of 'the gods', is so deeply connected with ourselves that the question arises why it is that we so desperately want to direct our lives ourselves. Is it not very comfortable that one or other power outside us makes choices for us, and with that is also responsible for everything in life, so that we may remain idle? This passivity obviously is in total conflict with what we want by nature. It seems that many of us through their behaviour indicate, that a 'divine' decision can never fully do justice to what is part of them, namely following the innate urge to be active and protect their organism themselves in the best possible way. Towards a 'divine' decision we prefer to merely be favourably disposed, as if it concerns a counsel handed to us in a difficult situation, but accepted or put aside by us as desired. Why then is this longing to direct our lives ourselves, innate? The wish not to undergo suffering may be an answer to that. And yet even that is not a clear explanation. For no matter how understandable it is to not wish suffering, would not a divine steering from on high be unerring, therefore be the best solution for us?

Where do we get the knowledge or the supposition that the divine judgment - in the shape as we know it - is unerring? In the history of the religions it can be found that in man's opinion the highest, divine personalities possess a knowledge and an insight that exceed those of man by far. Following this view, which often comes down to following the dogmas enforced by religions, may lead to personal suffering. Think of the families that for religious reasons do not want to have their children inoculated against diseases, and then lose them through those diseases. Yet even these people would like to prevent that they, by not deciding themselves, undergo an emotional experience that is unpleasant for them, that therefore is the contrary of happiness and must be designated with 'suffering', in whatever gradation.

Everything that we go through reluctantly, causes 'suffering'. Sometimes suffering can be a help to us. Not because it is imposed on us as an educational tool coming from a higher power, but because, when it occurs, it can bring us to reflection and for that reason can help us to get insight. We can get to this conclusion by deliberately not taking our resort to a notion like 'purpose'. According to many philosophies however, suffering is not a coincidence, but connected with a purpose. In the history of mankind man's living conditions have alternately been taken for a punishment from above, or for a confirmation of being elected. Mystics who stayed in monasteries and despite their sanctified way of living were struck by illness and adversity, in the eyes of their environment had had to be elected, called, for these special circumstances. There are many examples of philosophies of life in which suffering sanctified and accentuated a direct contact between man and godhead.

Eventually some people escaped the vision that their living conditions were imposed on them by way of punishment or reward. They discovered that knowledge of the laws of nature was the key to improving their circumstances of life. They began - just like the Egyptian highpriest - to assume the shape of the gods and thus organize their own lives. In order to direct the laws of nature we however must know how we can take the wheel in our own hands. For good reason the saying goes that the gods grant the wishes of those whom they want to punish. We must have a well-thought-out meaning about what life could or should be. What do we call happiness for instance? Is it the situation in which we are healthy? Happiness seems to be something about which everybody does have an opinion, and it all seems to bear down to it that no universal standard for happiness can be established. The notion health alone, which for most people indeed is an important measure for happiness, has in all times been subject to change. There are numberless philosophies and therapies which aim at illness and health and have mutually conflicting views. How subjective the opinion regarding illness can be, can be seen from the fact that its definition alters from century to century, and within each era it differs from culture to culture. For instance, the treating of illnesses by a shaman or another medium belongs to the normal pattern of everyday life in some civilizations, whereas the same conduct within another culture might be called abnormal. And the treatment of high blood pressure differs in France, Germany, the United States of America and other countries, due to the differing views in these countries regarding health and illness.

Therefore we must decide ourselves whether we consider a physical or psychical condition acceptable and whether we name it 'happiness' or 'suffering'. When we have established this, we must decide whether we want to change our lives at certain points and how to go about it: by directing entreaties to immaterial helpers, or by attuning ourselves to the working of the laws of nature and having them work for us. In practice: whether we want to give our bodily and psychical nature the food that it needs. What we expect from life is determined by a voice from within inducing us to choices regarding our lifestyle, and by an objective knowledge of the laws of nature. Is it a fact then, that we will be saved from suffering if we listen to the inside voice completely? To rephrase this: does any imbalance in our thinking indicate that through that we evoke suffering, and that when our thoughts are balanced there will be no suffering? When the thoughts are in balance, they do not allow an improper life that would give rise to suffering. But what is 'balance', and can anybody ever be fully balanced? Theoretically a balanced mind will have no difficulty in finding the right things to do, or - for instance - the right things to eat. When we look at animals we find that they have an uncanny ability to eat the proper food at the right time, be it to nourish themselves or to get rid of what they have already eaten. Cats for

instance eat sharp grass to vomit when they feel not well. Instinct is involved here. But balance is a relative notion and difficult to define. Our inward balance changes every day. We are not always working to our fullest potential. So we are influenced in our decisions and in the way our intuition functions. When we are balanced will we as its consequence always make the right choices, at least not find ourselves in negative situations? Are there no inward or outward influences that might take us into the wrong direction? If such influences are indeed absent it would imply that our balanced state of 'being' is no longer influenced, and would itself influence everything else.

A balanced state of living implies a law of cause and effect that can be steered by us directly and totally and without any misconceptions about what to do under any circumstance. It sounds like the perfect life, but also as a boring life. If any outward influences would be evoked, we would master them as well. A balanced person would be capable of avoiding an imbalanced diet, even in case the food that he would eat would not be of his own choice, or would contain a poison that no one told him was put into it on purpose. Owing to his infallible intuition a balanced person would discover this poison. He would govern everything, every step in his life, and could not be led or tempted to eat food that outwardly seemed all right but inwardly would be poisoned: he would know it by intuition at the highest level. This would mean that such a person would have no karmic burdens from previous lives. He would have reached the utmost level of purity. But at what level would he lose control? His body must digest food. Would there not be a constant battle in his body between on the one hand the micro-organisms that try to invade his body, and on the other hand the white corpuscles that try to defend his sphere of living? Would a totally balanced human being never be sick or get older, or even die? Would he know no suffering? It would be the utmost consequence of a conscious personality who totally controls the laws of nature through his being completely attuned to his inner voice. Would such an inner voice, when we listen to it, prevent suffering, and what do we recognize such a voice by? Many of us try to get a visual image of their inner voice, for a voice is but a voice. We are accustomed to the fact that a voice belongs to, is coming from, a being that directs that voice, so from a visible entity resembling our own person, at least resembling the human shape. The things that we hear or see on the inner plane, are to us as coming from the mirror image of the physical senses. The translation of the inner perceptions must take place in a shape that we recognize, otherwise their message would completely escape us. Therefore it is not surprising that the idea that inner promptings are coming from a (psychically) visible being has been inculcated into us from antiquity.

This is why we see that man has come to a personified image of God through his way of processing knowledge, laid down in the human philosophies and religions. Partly it is also the result of the phenomenon of the culture hero, a being that manifests itself within a culture, bringing the principles of science and philosophy to it. The achievements of these cultural heroes are far-reaching; they represent the highest and most important that the nation can imagine. The culture hero therefore not infrequently is deified, as countless myths make clear. We can try to live after such an example, and when we try to maintain certain high moral principles, it will prevent a certain level of suffering, but it is a special kind of suffering that is prevented in that manner. Things that we cannot influence will remain, and these may still cause suffering. When man compares the things that he sees around him with what he would like to see ideally, then the ideal situation, in which suffering is absent, will have a certain divineness for him. Thus he makes - creates - an image of a heavenly realm. He will come to paint and interpret the mode of

operation of the cosmos on the basis of his experiences. Should he see that parents assist their children, then he will expect that there is a higher power that will assist the grown-ups in the same manner. When parents worry about their children, will not then - such is his reasoning - a higher power equally worry about our well-being? And if parents make decisions that are well-meant but unfathomable for their children, will not then the pantheon in the same manner make decisions that are not understood by the adult? That man comes to a personified image of God may thus be the logical consequence of what he sees around him: numberless forms of hierarchy. Although his own person seems to be the end of a range of ever more intelligent forms of life, this range may to his way of thinking stretch out to the cosmic realm. There could be a totally autonomous range over there that is a continuation of the human one. But, a view in which not the gods but the laws of nature exercise hierarchical influence, can fit as well with what man sees around him daily: a world in which the phenomena are governed by laws of nature.

That way there literally can be a nonhuman deity; or a deity incarnate (for instance the culture hero); or it are the laws of nature, regulating everything. In all cases our standpoint about what directs us, is a form of projection. The personified image of God implies a God equipped with human qualities. He is benevolent or is not; he rewards or punishes; and many other human qualities have been projected onto him. Through this, someone who undergoes suffering and sees it in the light of an obviously necessary but unfathomable interference by his godhead becomes more understandable. It is even human that he lets his standpoint regarding it depend on what he needs and not on what may be logical.

When we feel the need to find a 'human' ear for our worries and questions, and if we would rather have a personal deity - who sometimes gives us suffering - than a world view of impersonal laws of nature (where suffering is only a result of the laws of cause and effect), then we might 'choose' a personified deity. But when indeed a personified image of God is near to our hearts, everything that happens to us should be interpreted by us as coming from a person who subjects us to a judgment and whose reasonings we cannot understand. It requires a docility as that of a child following its parents. This docility is almost blind, because the lower consciousness cannot measure up to the higher consciousness, or because it has not yet developed to such an extent that it puts questions, or because it yields in the assumption that the higher consciousness will never adopt a negative attitude. The yielding to the higher consciousness can bring suffering with it, if at all the lower consciousness is aware of what is happening.

Suppose a little girl, standing on the pavement of a busy street where cars pass by every second, has her eyes fixed on the window of a shop at the other side, where a beautiful doll has attracted her attention. She stands beside her mother, who firmly holds her hand. The little girl has only one thing on her mind: I must go to that doll for I want to have it. But her mother will not let her go, in the awareness of the dangerous cars crossing the road. She has the safety of her child in mind, and it bursts into tears because her mother will not let her go to her goal. The girl, when asked about her purpose in life, might give the answer that she wants the doll, but that one force or other prevents her from reaching this goal. An adult in comparable circumstances might wonder how to adjust his preset purpose. He knows his goal is right, but the gods (or the laws of nature) apparently do not support him, or do not allow it.

We may have outlined purposes and at the same time may wonder about the purpose of life. The little girl could only understand this if she would be capable of elevating her level of

consciousness to that of her mother, but she cannot. If we want to find out why something has been bestowed upon us, we should raise our consciousness to a higher level than that of a human being. However, in the example with the girl we see a personified actor: her mother. When considering ourselves as beings that are guided by higher intelligences, higher powers, we can decide to let this personified image go. Our common interpretation of being guided is, that 'someone' has the 'intention' to guide us. But when there is no 'guidance' beside the circumstance that the laws of nature work, then our picture of something having an intention is no longer valid. It is difficult for us to understand that something may happen to us as the innate result of laws of nature that change things from the one into the other state. Thus it is difficult to get an answer to the question what our purpose in life is, for we might only feel satisfied with an answer on the human level, given by a human being who explains it all. But such a human being does not exist. Therefore many people try to find an answer by supposing that it can be found with someone with a higher nature, someone with a higher level of consciousness, that is, with a personality altogether.

The example with the child showed us, that when parents take a good measure their child does not necessarily recognize this as something favourable. But when the measure is unjust, the child often does not recognize it either. Beside the assumption that man is guided by entities with a higher level of consciousness, in many mythologies and religions we find that the gods are fallible and make mistakes. This is also the case in the Western religions. Christianity for instance unites the fallibility of the human son of God, Jesus Christ, with the divine infallibility of the Father and the Holy Spirit. With it the divine helper gets such a status that he has an infallible judgment. This explains why people take it, that in his (= Gods) name incomprehensible judgments take place, of which judgments by the way we generally find that we - had we been gods and had we been faced with the choice - would not have passed them. The point of view that a deity is infallible, is suggested to somebody partly by what he has seen in hierarchical relations on earth, for instance in upbringing. There he sees that parents sometimes take measures that are not understood by their children. This makes it easier for him to accept that there are forms of consciousness that exceed the consciousness of the adult and that at that level the same incomprehensible measures are taken.

When there are beings that are more evolved (maybe I had better say: are on a different level by their nature), they may have the same role towards us, as parents have towards their children. But these are comparisons all the way belonging to the way of reasoning that we procure as human beings. As the child can only fully understand the reasoning of its parents when it has grown up and is a parent itself, thus we can only fully understand how a form of life transcending ours acts and reacts, when we are on the same level of understanding as that form of life. We should be careful in general with projecting our way of thinking - of our concept of 'purpose' - to a higher spiritual level. Through our cultural and personal upbringing we have grown accustomed to the thesis that the deity has at its disposal an immeasurable wisdom, and that we can only consider life bearable by departing from that wisdom. It does not cross our mind to think that, now that the judgment of the godhead time and again is brought up for discussion (with disasters: "Why does God allow this?"), it is about time to subject our judgment regarding an omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, personified deity to a thorough revaluation.

How does all this influence our vision on karma and suffering? If there would be a God in the sense of a personified godlike entity, we could imagine ourselves going into debate with him and

exchange logical arguments pro and contra several aspects of karma and of the necessity of karma in general. Should we consider God to be the whole of the cosmic laws of nature, then we cannot go into a dialogue with it. But is this a disadvantage? We might probe the 'intentions' of those laws by studying their effects, which brings us in a kind of 'dialogue' with them. Studying the laws teaches us how they work, and what they do if we oppose them in such and such a manner, or when we work according to their nature. Learning how to use the laws gives mastership. The question why this could not have been thus arranged that no growth would be needed, is caused by the way in which our intellectual capacity works. It is us who ask those questions, but when we stop our mental activity, for instance during meditation, there will no longer be a 'why'. Nature consists of laws that are working like they do because they are what they are. Otherwise we would not talk about the cosmic as we know it. Now what is the connection of all this with karma and suffering? First of all that when we take the view that we are governed by laws of nature instead of by personifiable deities, we can leave the concept of 'purpose' behind us. Secondly, when we stop thinking, for that reason the question after a purpose is no longer open. From the attitude of a human being who subjects himself to a judgment that he cannot judge, it does become apparent how the divine 'judgment' can come about: through the total submission of man to that judgment; which judgment he considers 'just', just because he cannot value it. The first who realized that this is an important factor in life, were the freethinkers. In their search for a better explanation of the phenomena with which they had to deal daily, they came to the conclusion that the common judgment about the godhead had to be adjusted. The view of pharao Ichnaton that there is only one God, was only one of the results of that. It was an attempt to classify all human qualities (as expressed in countless shapes of deities) in a religious 'unification theory'. With that the human qualities, divided over many deities, were united in the shape of one godhead. However, still no nonhuman, really 'divine' shape had come into existence. A symbol was still used to indicate the deity. This was: the sun.

Will the next development in the history of this complex area come from a standpoint that opposes an impersonal God against the personified or symbolized One-god? The mystics have always seen the invisible worlds as the realms of which man can take cognizance through meditation and contemplation. But even they, seen the work of Ichnaton, could not escape symbolizing, personifying, the godhead in some way or other. The mystics - who still felt difficulty in letting go a human image of God - developed opinions about a gradual creation, in which they incorporated both cabbalistic and astronomical elements. In their opinion man, being in the highest levels of the material realms of creation, could contact the lowest levels of the immaterial realms of creation. The drafting of concentric, hierarchical models with groupings of angels remains a token of the need of the mystics to ascribe the things that they could no longer understand in their deepest essence, to a divine creature that can oversee everything and, after higher standards, can direct it in a just manner, by means of hierarchies of helpers. In all these concentric systems therefore a deity is yet in the centre of all circles, sometimes still obliquely personified, but sometimes also represented by a symbol, a hebrew sign, or a sun. Thus the divine is as yet drawn into the world of concepts of man, by means of a symbol. Although many mystical philosophies do not distance themselves (wholly) from the personified image of God, many of them concentrate on the working of the laws of nature. These philosophies can even incorporate the laws of nature as the instruments with which the deity makes known its presence and influence. This notion may bring closer together both points of view that the higher can be personified or - on the contrary - must be nonpersonified.

The moment we indeed attribute everything to the laws of nature, we hold out to ourselves the prospect of a better control over the forces of nature. For knowledge is power, and he who knows the laws of nature can bend them to his will. At this point the gap that has kept the established religions and the mystics divided comes into perspective. Man masters his fate when he possesses all knowledge of the laws of nature. In this line of reasoning it takes only one step to the notion that all the laws of nature together could bear the name 'godhead' and that man really masters his fate when he has become the godhead himself. But this again introduces a divine creature at the end of the hierarchy of laws of nature. Mystics normally do not go so far as to put that eventually they could be a god. For that, they deem their role in nature too small. They rather reflect the god than that they equal it, mindful of the expression that the microcosmos reflects the macrocosmos. The establishment (the religions) can only meet the mystics through the compromise that there is a godhead that governs everything, and that the whole of the laws of nature is subjected to this godhead. Many mystics do not prefer this view. For it are they, who put that the godhead consists of all those laws of nature. Even stronger, that this relationship should not bear the name of 'godhead' per se.

Have we made up our minds about whether the universe consists of independent laws of nature, or whether there is a divine being that directs the universe, possibly through those laws of nature? Knowledge about the working of a phenomenon is the first step towards its mastering. Controlling life comes within reach for the faculty of thought that can form itself an image of the laws which govern existence. This is, in so far as it is about certain matters. For instance we will not be able to prevent that we will have to deal with death, because it is a law of nature that everything constantly changes its shape. But how we stand towards death is dependent on the control that we have over the mind. When we lose someone who is dear to us we feel the depth of the pain, for that is a human and understandable thing. If our brain can see one or two of the cosmic principles involved, it does not lessen our grief, but it does make it more bearable. A totally disconnected mind will no longer suffer under a loss that it undergoes. This is a law also. But such a mind, no longer open to grief, to compassion or to love, is something we do not see as an ideal phenomenon. By keeping an open mind we shall remain susceptible to losses of a certain kind, and therefore also be subjected to suffering. The remarkable conclusion may be, that we do not want to be deprived of suffering in all cases, for we would have to pay a very high price for that: the one of becoming blunt and of total imperviousness. We find it more important to keep our susceptibility to perceive, even if it means that through it we have to undergo a form of suffering from time to time. Suffering should not be isolated from its basic aspects, for it is a result of laws of nature regarding attunement, equilibrium and duality. Mystical study will bring balance. This does not mean that a mystic has no difficulty with affliction. For him the accepting of the inevitable suffering that he meets in life, is quite a task, just like it is for everybody. He is not in the situation that he is indifferent towards influences that try to attack him or may bring him in a position of weakness or illness. That would be very unnatural indeed, for the resistance against those influences is very basic, because it is related to surviving. The deepest layers in our personality try to keep us in the position that we are in. That is, in a state of normal functioning, not impeded by circumstances that make the body or the mind suffer. This does not always work, because there are energies or events which may try to break us. These energies are governed by their own laws.

When we see the manifestations of the cosmic energies and by and by are able to recognize their pattern, we are in awe by the incredible complexity of the universe. When the mind unfolds, it

will be better able to adapt to the laws that it is beginning to understand. It is a long way to get to know enough of the universe and its laws to be able to steer it as we want. There may be obstacles that seem insurmountable. But sometimes a scientific or other discovery suddenly makes that they can be conquered. A child however whose parents died when it was young, cannot get them back in this life. The man or woman born without a limb or an eye often cannot be helped. There are factors that cannot be mended by a person's mystical or scientific exertion. But then again there may be no big difference between all kinds of situations (connected with either our body or mind or with events in our environment) when we realize that they are only hindrances if our mind recognizes them as such. Some obstacles we might consequently be able to overcome merely by having a different attitude towards them. But even this may not always be possible. Some things we can change, other ones we cannot. I think this view is still in harmony with the (not exclusively mystical) view that things can be changed by directing the forces of nature. We sometimes can steer them through our knowledge, but often we cannot. When the laws of nature work unbridled they may interfere with our plans and expectations. This may cause us suffering.

In mystic circles suffering is as much as possible disconnected from guilt, sin, fines, punishment or reward; concepts that are inextricably, though unjustly, connected with the notion karma. Unjustly, for there is no place for such concepts in a doctrine that takes its departure from the strictly fair working of the laws of nature and from cause and effect. Even the term 'strictly fair working' does not do justice to the term suffering, if suffering is a phenomenon corresponding to impersonal laws of nature that do not pass a human judgment. What happens in nature is 'without values'. It is us who attach a qualification to something, who call something good, bad or fair. In many circles illness and misfortune or suffering are seen as the result of sin, as a punishment; a punishment that has been administered because of the bad deeds of the victim or his forefathers. There are also circles in which suffering is seen as a token of being elected. These things have to do with a personified image of God; with an intelligence with human traits who connects a negative or positive result to a cause, whereby man calls the negative result an imposed punishment and the positive result a reward. In the case of the elected person the suffering that he endures will be called the result of a divine intervention, and not a negative thing as such, as would have been the case had the event happened to a nonelect. We must realize that when a result is seen as part of an impersonal chain of cause and effect, the notions reward or punishment are no longer applicable. Finally, next to people who consider grief to be the result of sin or as a token of being elected, there are people who consider illness or misfortune to be something that takes one by surprise and for which one bears no responsibility. In this view a victim is not to blame. Now, in mysticism suffering generally is not stigmatized either. This might be a relief to many. For when suffering does not come into being on the basis of someone's behaviour one need not be ashamed of it. On the other hand mystical philosophy often puts, that an event does not take somebody by surprise. In many mystical schools it is taught that the things that we experience are closely connected with whom we are and with the way we are in harmony with the laws of nature. Some laws work out without our personal interference. There are other laws that we do influence. When we neglect those it can have a visibly negative result. In human terms we call such a conduct blameworthy, because we expect of an intelligent person that he does not manoeuvre himself into a negative situation that he could have avoided had he paid attention. Thus also in mysticism by back door methods the 'blame' is again the person's who is struck by something, for even if one puts that suffering has nothing to do with punishment a violation of the laws of nature has a negative result, brought

about by a lack of insight with the victim, and this negative result is a type of 'one's own fault'.

It is important that we look ahead and lay the emphasis on the striving to be in harmony with what surrounds us. That is more interesting than contemplating to what extent wrong behaviour or wrong thoughts can bring us into an undesired situation. Many people recognize, that suffering or problems do not mean punishment or reward, but are a result of the law of cause and effect, and that much of the suffering is the result of the wrongly applying of the laws of nature. Yet it is tempting, when we see an injustice happen, to not see this as something of which the causer purely on the basis of the law of cause and effect cannot avoid the effects. For we are inclined to hope that the guilty one will not be able to escape his punishment in the future, due to karma. In our inner being a deeply felt craving comes up for a just judge who repairs the injustice that we ourselves can not correct. Inevitably the notion 'karma' in every meaning known to us seems to encompass a form of punishment. For many the point of departure that there is a system of laws of nature, often for a short moment makes place again for the need for a personified image of God. This is why some sometimes call karma a punishment, sometimes a matter of cause and effect. We have difficulty with fathoming what happens in life, which is due to the fact that our mind wants to find a cause no matter what. We may be accustomed to the idea that of necessity the laws of nature work through cause and effect, but our human nature is seeking a justification for this law. This justification will be most concrete when we have the feeling that behind cause and effect an understanding intelligence lies hidden. This feeling is very understandable. Deep in our hearts we find it difficult to live with a concept of a law not consciously directed by a personality with a specific aim. It seems to us that a blindly working law is void of everything we like to see in a human judge: compassion, mercy, a listening ear. Shortly, we are rather willing to accept the things in life if they are coming from a spiritual entity with almost human decisive powers, than when they come from a cold, insensitive law that has no emotions, no attachment to our needs. But are we at all satisfied with a judge who is a human being, or with a law of nature? If we would be judged by an earthly judge, we would ask ourselves why there is no higher, spiritual power to judge us. But then, if we have to deal with a law of nature that simply works through cause and effect, we ask ourselves why this law has no human, emotional feelings. It looks as if we try to find a spiritual (nonhuman) judge who cannot make mistakes, but at the same time we hope that this literally nonhuman judge has a human judgment and is merciful. But these two things do not go together. We are accustomed to think in terms of good and bad, right and wrong, reward and punishment, when we are confronted with cause and effect. When we drop a stone from a building, it will fall to the ground. It is a matter of cause and effect. Is it right? Is it wrong? It is just how nature works. The more we learn to see in what manner the law of cause and effect works, the better we can foresee to which effects our actions, thoughts and deeds (the causes) lead. Through that we hope to slowly master our living conditions.

There is a tremendous range of causes and effects in our lives. Actually it is all there is. Some coincide with others and therefore seem to strengthen a given situation. At that moment our mind is starting to put questions about their mutual connection. For instance, when we see a stone fall from the roof, we see one cause and effect. When some time later we eat our meal, we add elements to our body which keep it in good condition. A matter of cause and effect too. But nothing in the situation of the stone and the meal brings us to assume that their coinciding or their relative nearness in time has some special meaning. There are many other situations in which there is no real connection either and in which we nonetheless, unjustly, assume that there

is such a connection. I once heard somebody ask why a father with two little children should have contracted a deadly disease, whereas he did have a family that could not miss him. Let us analyse what the matter is with this father with young children on the one hand, and the fatal illness that he had on the other hand. Our first conclusion is, that both situations are the result of the law of cause and effect. That the father has children, is quite a normal result of the coming together of man and wife: a law of cause and effect. That he has become ill, is the result of the law of cause and effect too. Something must have gone wrong in the energy levels of his body, or he has been in a dangerous situation, or any other thing happened that made him contract the disease. Let us continue our analysis. Why do we look for a reason why a father with a promising family life should be punished with a disease that will ruin this family life? Because we couple suffering to punishment and reward. We employ punishment and reward to 'value' the situation of our fellow human beings. We reward agreeable behaviour in order that our environment remains filled with innocent persons and situations. It is a matter of survival. So it is not that strange that we start a reverse reasoning: when we perceive suffering it resembles in its manifestation a punishment meted out by man. Therefore we expect to see a negative cause - guilt, injustice - in the subject of that 'punishment'. Otherwise our world view will no longer correspond. However, when we think commonsensical we must recognize that we cannot just make those cross bonds and this also applies to the father in our example. First of all getting children is one isolated situation where cause and effect rule, and contracting a disease is another isolated situation, with its own causes and effects. They are completely in harmony with nature (with the nature of how things work out, that is), and cannot be compared. But, when we compare them anyhow, the connections that we perceive will give a distorted image of reality. Such a distorted image underlines that we are what we think, and that suffering and happiness are forms of consciousness and do not lead a life of their own. Of this yet another example can be given. When somebody is on a journey and his house burns down, he may be joyful as long as he has not heard the news of his house being burned down. Yet, while being joyful he at the same time may be financially ruined. Now the opposite. Somebody is told that he has won a big amount of money. He is joyful and feels rich. Afterwards it appears that the ticket that he wants to cash, is not valid. Although all this time he has not owned the money, for a short while he has lived with the illusion that he was rich, and now he feels depressed.

So far this has been a philosophical discussion, and I am more than aware that the positions in it yet do not make things in life more easy to accept. When we encounter a situation as we have just seen described, of the ill father with his children, we can only feel compassion, because we are human beings. I have never met a mystic that was so fully enlightened that he was completely deaf to the suffering in the world. I even think that when we would meet a person who has no emotions at all, we would know one thing for sure: that that person is not a mystic whatsoever. On the contrary. The more a mystic develops, the more compassionate he becomes. Suffering is one thing that has always fascinated me, and although the concepts of cause and effect are always involved with it, I know at the same time that only human emotions make us real human beings. Suffering always keeps us occupied, because it is so near to us. The suffering that happens to others, can hit us just as hard as the suffering that relates to ourselves. We shall always seek for a power that compensates the suffering that has been caused. There is an issue that in relation to suffering should not be paid too little attention. What do we expect with regard to somebody who treats another person badly? Will the former person (in his present or future life) be badly treated himself as well, so that nature is in equilibrium again? Then a chain comes into existence that cannot be broken. Or would the laws of nature work out in such a way that a

compensation is brought about that is symbolic as to its nature? With that I mean, whether it is conceivable that certain actions lead to consequences that have a symbolic relation with their cause, so that these consequences are more or less mirrored in the person who caused them. For instance, someone who has killed many people intentionally, might get into the position in which he will severely suffer under the loss of someone dear to him. This would imprint on his mind the value of human life. And someone who has been positive (not per se after human standards) might be 'rewarded' by feeling centered in an atmosphere of profound peace. All this would still imply an unbreakable chain of events, but they would not be all similar as to their shape. They would even lead to a betterment of mankind. But even these views are very human, because they replace the concept of 'judgment' by the concept of 'symbolic compensation'. Perhaps you noticed, that when cause and effect are thus in line, we keep feeling that some directing intelligence, a personality, must have contributed to it. For, how could nature have arranged it so symbolically itself? More questions still remain. How could a war criminal do penance for his guilt? To human measures there can be no compensation that is in proportion to the suffering of the many who have suffered through him. When the mystical standpoint regarding karma is right, namely that every cause has an effect, it must lead to the conclusion that the result that everyone experiences for his deeds, may be of a completely different order than we can imagine. For, after human standards a blinded human being who has ruined the lives of many others can never make up for it, pay off for it. We all can conceive a payment for one murder, but we know of no equal form of compensation for a person who in a war has had millions of people killed. There are shortcomings in the viewpoint that every phenomenon that we are aware of, is 'judged' by higher intelligences the same way as we would judge ourselves. Firstly because on those intelligences we project our way of judging, and secondly because it is not at all certain that such intelligences do exist, or act as we think they do. It is obvious that the theory of compensation and the theory of karma have many secrets that are as yet unravelled.

If we would want to establish whether there is a balance between one system of compensating (for instance applying earthly law) and another system (karmic results of a different nature), we would firstly have to establish what the difference is, if there is one. Can compensating for something through earthly law, be considered a form of paying a 'cosmic debt'? If we would agree that karma is the law of cause and effect, is there something against assuming that a person has to 'compensate' for some wrongdoing, through the legal earthly systems and other ways as well? He who assumes this, will do so because there are many cases in which somebody on the basis of legislation has to offer a compensation seen by many as absolutely inadequate. In this example there is talk of 'wrongdoing', but naturally cause and effect are linked in all sorts of circumstances; a 'wrongdoing' is only one minor example of a 'cause'. One can ask how we should establish when the several forms of compensation together form a compensation of a hundred percent. Putting the question whether there can be a balance between sorts of compensation assumes that we would be able to establish that a compensation could be measured in a percentage of the whole, and for instance would amount to twenty percent, and that we would also be able to calculate that the percentage of any other kind of compensation would amount to eighty percent, so that the whole might be a hundred percent. It would seem clear that we have no such measure to apply to any sort of compensation. In other words, we do not know when a cause has expressed itself completely in a result and therefore has exhausted its strength. For instance, if we throw a stone at somebody (= cause), he may get hurt (= effect). We might be caught in the act, and be fined for it by a judge (= an effect as well). Now who in the cosmic will register this, in order that in the future we will not have to compensate for our

mistake again? But if we are not caught, who will tell what hidden effect it may have on our future life? We may feel miserable afterwards and be driven to do something with our remorse. We might want to go to schools to hold lectures about the uselessness of violence, thus turning the effect that the event had on us, to something of a positive nature.

Some people wonder how karma can be fulfilled when somebody is not able to suffer under his deeds. This depends on the definition of karma. If we consider karma as the law of cause and effect with which the effect must be consciously known by us to be appreciated and to fulfil its true purpose, then indeed there would be no reason for karma if the person undergoing the result has no conscience. But if karma is just the impersonal law of cause and effect, the effect will show, no matter the state of mind of the receiver of the effect. Let us also remember that the causer of a cause is always the receiver of its effect, albeit often another effect than that which has its impact on another person on whom the cause was aimed.

Furthermore, the notion 'conscience' could be related to the term 'consciousness'. Does karma work when somebody is unconscious? Of course. Would an unconscious man not be hurt when the roof of the house fell on his head? The cause and the effect are there. The riddle only pops up when we consider karma as something that some person is bestowing on us with the intent to make us understand a situation. Only in such a situation karma could only perform its job when we would be conscious of what was happening. But karma is not some entity that tries to make us understand something. When karma is active, it brings us into situations of the mind or body that are the results of earlier causes. And if we consequently draw some conclusions from those effects, like the insight that we should avoid certain acts, thoughts or circumstances giving us unpleasant feelings, then we have learned something, but not because karma was wanting us to. Ultimately we may understand, that the more we learn to understand the working of the laws of nature, the more we know how to be in harmony with them, and the better we find our way through life. Karma thus is the recurring factor that dominates our lives, and when we are attuned, its working may eventually force us to be conscious, because in that way we are no longer a toy for the forces in the universe.

Maybe you have ever wondered how karma - when it exists - can be taken with us from a former life. How does it find its consequence in our present life? When experiences are racked from former lives to this life, along which medium will this take place? First of all we should examine what it is exactly that we can take along with us and why. For the sake of convenience I will leave out of consideration the mystical theory that in consecutive lives we must learn lessons. For the mystical theory that every cause has its effect is much more important, because any lesson that we might acquire is only of interest to the point that we discover which type of cause leads to which type of consequence. Is not it that which helps us to determine which causes lead to pleasant effects, and which ones to unpleasant ones that we like to avoid? But in order to know what it is exactly that we take with us from life to life and how, we must now purely address the phenomenon of cause and effect. The things in life that we cause ourselves consciously, come into being on the basis of our thoughts, objectives and deeds. Now suppose that through a certain way of thinking we also act in a certain manner. Then this is by degrees anchored in our personality. When we arrive in a new life, this fixed pattern of thinking might be present there as well, when we assume that we take our soul personality along with us to a next life. The character then expresses itself via our soul

personality in its togetherness with the brains and the mental and material part of our new being.

This does not seem to be such a strange idea. But what about our deeds? Can they also have a result in the future? And how does this express itself? They are an outcome of our thinking and willing. In this sense a certain pattern of thought leads to certain actions. But this does not explain why in a new life certain things should befall us. For this as well is part of the common mystical theories: that certain things do not befall us just like that. Yet this is not at all so obvious. For, on which grounds would somebody in a next life have to live through all kinds of nasty or - for that matter - pleasant things that cannot be traced back to his physical, mental or spiritual state of mind, and are not consciously strived after by him or caused by him demonstrably. When there is an apparent invisible link with the past, how then has the cause been translated to its effect, and which are the forces involved?

We often postulate that something is our 'karma'. But it remains in the dark why and how we could attract situations on the basis of how we have lived in the past. It remains unclear how the energies that we have built up could be translated by the cosmic in numerous situations that befall us from the outside: illnesses, the loss of dear ones, poverty, richness, accidents that are caused by others. We are inclined to attribute them to karma, this is to an energetic condition from former lives, without having any insight at all in the physical causality. And that is what should be there, if our assertion that things happen to us because of karma, can be maintained.

Suppose that somebody is very poor. We may then be inclined to think that in a former life he has not used his wealth properly. And when we see somebody misbehave himself we are inclined to think that in a next life it will be automatically thrown in his face. This is caused by our relationship with the notions karma and reincarnation: we find it difficult to not think in terms of punishment. Anyway, we do want to see this link with the past, because our theory prescribes that there is a preservation of energy, that there is cause and effect, and that we always determine our own future. But who knows whether the poverty of a small child in Central Africa is just the effect of another cause, to wit the economic relations in that country. For that is a natural law as well. If this child would consciously have chosen to be born in destitute conditions in that poor country (remember the mystical theory that somebody chooses his own parents), what lesson then will it have acquired when it succumbs at the age of one? And what lesson can someone get who has been born with a state of consciousness that we can but call obscured, and who during his whole life is not capable to communicate with his fellow-men? When the condition of this person is karmic, there must be in his frame an energetic 'requisite' to summon that condition (with a year-long delay, or at once at birth). So then there must be a field of force that at birth, from the cosmic, transcribes the karmic conditions to the physical body, or interlaces them from a spiritual level with that physical body. How are those fields of force brought to activity or discharging through the physical organism in such a manner that the physical frame is going to work as a magnet that attracts certain situations from the outside?

We should be able to effortlessly fit in in our mystical theories every human situation, every state of being. Alas, we are not very good at that. There is still a lot to be done in the future if we want to be able to physically found the mystical theories about karma and reincarnation.

Until that moment has arrived the theories regarding it remain models.

I want to conclude with a personal experience. A private circumstance is for any soul personality the mirror in which his inner essence is reflected, his karma is revealed. Situations of war and natural disasters are events par excellence that raise questions about the role of karma. The poem below I wrote after having seen a war documentary on Discovery Channel. It was made by Krossfire Productions and showed a scene from the Second World War where a little child was torn away from her mother. The mother was led to other people near a house. The child managed to escape the forceful hand of the soldier, turned and ran to her mother. This was a scene that deeply struck me. Why do people cause so much suffering to others. The child ran in pain and distress. While doing so, she fell on her knees and even had to cope with that pain.

War 40-45

Forgive me child, I did not see your tears
For when you wept I had not yet been born
And this dumb reason later made me mourn
My heart that bleeds with you observed no fears

Because my soul resided in heaven high
You stood alone and were a pray to wrong
I rather listened to an angelic song
Than that I lightened your tormented sigh

But when you to my heavenly shelter ran
You found protection at my side at last
A cloak that was a frightened cherub's shield

I dried your eyes as best as dreamers can
And always will I deeply feel aghast
That through angelic choirs my ears were sealed

70. The value of an oath

In many esoteric schools solemn vows are made. Most of them are not divulged to the members preceding their installation or initiation. The background of this is that the solemnity of the moment must make a profound impression on the mind of the candidate, and that he must react alert and must make a choice. He must know where he stands and what he wants, but he must also be overwhelmed by what comes to him during an initiation. Some find it unjust that the candidates are not allowed to take cognizance in advance of what they are about to solemnly pledge. My view was and is, that an oath first of all is a declaration of intent made towards oneself. To anchor something that is important to us, we may find ourselves pledging. Some oaths are made in silence, other ones before others. Secondly it is a snapshot in time. Things change, the world changes, we progress and during this process our insight grows.

One can be of the opinion that when somebody is firm about something, he should no longer alter it. However, it is the hallmark of a progressing personality that he thinks and is willing to adapt to inner and outer changes. When his inner voice sees that the oath is no longer valid, he should adapt to that voice. Otherwise maintaining an oath would only mean an intellectual adaptation to what people think we should do. We are our own Master. We are the only persons who can lift an oath from us. And sometimes we may have to do just that. There are circumstances, wartime for example, where maintaining certain oaths could mean the destruction of human civilization. Surely taking an oath is generally felt as a very important human action. We should not go about it lightly.

71. The function of experiences

Someone said: "My problem is that I don't want to convince myself of ideas contrary to my own. I do not view my differences of opinion, ideals and beliefs as an obstacle. These are statements of my independence and individuality which I worked hard and long to achieve." It is right that we adhere to our own convictions, for even when they are wrong once in a while, as regularly happens to all of us, we had better follow our own than someone else's. This does not mean that we should not be open to advice and suggestions. But when our convictions have come into being after hard and long work, it is clear that advice and suggestions are still in a phase preceding this. They are the building blocks of our experience. All the elements of our personal experience shape the life that we lead. When we are contented with the type of experiences, we continue along the same lines. In the other case we try to arrange the future in such a manner that we are heading towards other experiences. What it is all about, is that we, on the basis of what lies behind us, determine what is good for us in the future. Even if we do not know exactly what 'good' is, we must follow a guiding principle still. Even if we are rushing along after a delusion during our entire life, we do this because we think that it helps us along. It is not possible to live without making mistakes. We often would like to retrace our steps. But we cannot live with this constantly in mind. There must be left some room for all of us to be able to live uncomplicated and spontaneously, not hampered by the idea that we might regret any of our actions later.

We tend to live after our own experiences, which is strongly related to our quality to define - in terms that we accept and understand - every word and every situation that we are confronted with. But every definition leads to other definitions, which would make life unbearable were it not that we can feel the underlying core of what we try to do, or try to express. Suppose we would greet someone in the street with: "Good morning." He answers with: "'Good'? What is 'good'? What do you understand by it? Isn't 'good' relative and depending on our point of view? Doesn't it change during the centuries? What is the moral basis that you had in mind? And what do you understand by 'morning'? Is it the earthly morning of this planet? Do you mean the span of time between 6.00 and 12.00 AM, or do you have in mind the relative period of the day?" It would be perfectly clear that we would constantly have communication problems if we would try to define everything endlessly like that. In everyday life we therefore constantly accept that there is a communication beyond words and that putting too much questions will never lead to understanding. When people meet and wish each other a good morning it does not even matter whether it is morning at all or a few minutes in the afternoon already. Both parties would recognize the intention of their communication. Life becomes bearable when we let some things run their course. The ultimate communication takes place through being silent. But in our mutual communication, as has become visible here, we also see its paradox.

One of my acquaintances once told me a lovely story. He had met a little girl, who asked him all kinds of questions. He tried to answer them and found that after each answer she asked: "Why?" So instead of being satisfied with an answer, the girl would use each answer to formulate a new question. This went on for a while and when he was beginning to feel a little desperate after another 'why' of the child, he had a luminous idea. When she asked "Why?" again, he simply said to her: "Oh my, what a nice dress you are wearing!" The girl proudly replied: "Yes, isn't it?" and stopped asking questions immediately. This shows that shifting our point of view and our focus, may shut off earlier situations. It opens the way to new experiences. Consciously leaving undesired situations however, is no guarantee that the results of such situations will completely

end. They may on the contrary last a lifetime. We may see this in matters where we leave a path that we consider to be harmful for our development. The results of what we did in the past carry on, despite the insights that we have gained and despite our determination to never again make the same mistakes. In other words, realizing that we do not want to repeat an old experience, does in itself not stop the results of that experience. There remains a link between the past and the present, also in positive situations, and that is what we call 'karma'. Therefore it is important what we do, for in everything that we do we lay the foundation for our future, and we are responsible for it. Sometimes we hear on the news of an assault having been committed and the perpetrators claiming responsibility. My opinion is, that one is responsible for an irresponsible act, but cannot claim responsibility for it. Firstly because, at the most, irresponsibility should be claimed instead of responsibility. Secondly because responsibility is not something that one opts for, but something that is bestowed upon one through the working of the Law. This may seem a matter of semantics, but irrespective of our accepting an event or not, it has or has not been caused by us, and when it has been caused by us, we are responsible for it.

Does accepting responsibility for an event make us more enlightened? When we burn our hand on a stove out of neglecting hot surfaces, we may instantly be aware of the cause of that event. But if we are of the opinion that it has a purpose, or that it intends to teach us something, there is no reason for our mind to feel pain any longer after we have burned ourselves and after we have realized how the burning was brought about. Yet the pain continues autonomously. If we learn to see the burning as the mere result of the coming together of a hot surface (the stove), and a soft surface (our hand) that cannot digest the heat without being damaged (neutral cause and neutral effect), then it is perfectly clear why the painful experience lasts, even if we know that in the future we want to stay away and should stay away from hot surfaces. Our insight is then the result of realizing that impersonal natural laws are governing what happened, and this will make us cautious and 'enlightened'. The feeling that is evoked by the burn may lead to some insight or a procedure, or seems to induce such insight, as if some 'urge' to gain or realize insight emanates from that feeling. In this sense we attach on all levels of our being a meaning to anything that we are aware of. Only if we are not aware of anything, for instance when we are in a coma, we no longer have impressions of that kind. The person who attains self-awareness can form an opinion about what happens to him. This is what shapes his experience. It is a highly personal event, that brings with it responsibility. When this self-awareness gets a moral basis and tries to feel one with everything existing it leads to enlightenment. A long range of characteristic experiences is needed for that.

Would it be true, as some people suggest, that we as human beings must experience everything in order to become enlightened? The acceptance of the viewpoint that we have to experience everything, would have vast consequences. It would require an answer to a lot of questions, a defining of many elements. For instance: What is 'everything': everything there is (at what point in time?), or everything that we can experience? And what is 'experiencing': living through something with us in the centre, or with us at its periphery, onlooking? Through what should the experiencing be done: through our brains or cells, our outer spheres of consciousness or the inner layers? In what field must the experiencing lie: the physical, mental, psychical, conceptual? If we would experience everything possible, it would imply that we all should live each other's lives. This can never take place of course. The thought behind the thesis that we should experience everything, is that it would form a necessary cumulation of knowledge and enlightenment in our person. Experiencing everything would imply living through the inward

nature of anything in the universe. But this is inconsistent with what we have come to understand and accept of nature, which is, that everything is related to everything through vibrations, but is also separated from it for the same reason. There are differences throughout the universe as part of its nature. There is no reason for man to go through every conceivable situation. Maybe at the basis of the thesis that we should live through everything, also lies the subconscious longing to master everything incomprehensible. I think it is more important to be in harmony with everything. We do this with ourselves in the centre. This enables us to observe and experience things without having to become one with them if we do not want to.

Someone asked if by going through the wrong experiences on purpose, he might help others with the insights that come from those wrong experiences. This sounds confusing. What good would it do to put oneself in harm's way if no absolute and acute necessity to do so is present? The best thing a mystical student can do, is going through the phases of learning and experimenting. He can study the principles that mystics before him have studied, and with an open mind try to put these principles into practice. When the principles seem to work, he makes them part of his stock-in-trade, to act upon them for the future. When two people study the same principles and experiment with them, the one person may come to one conclusion, the other to another conclusion. Every man follows his own path. The other person may come to different results; that is his path. Any choice made leads to harmony or disharmony, depending on the insight that the person who is experimenting is able to develop. Let us follow our own path, not distracted by the behaviour of other students. They may be right, but they may also be wrong.

72. A walk

The other day I found myself in town at the beginning of a long road. When I had turned the corner to start with this road it struck me how long it was. When you looked right ahead to the end of it you could hardly see where it stopped. This occupied me while I was walking, and no matter how long I looked at the utmost end of the street, I seemed to make no progress whatsoever. My brain and my feeling came to opposite conclusions. On the one hand I realized that I would end up at the other end by itself, but when I saw that I took step after step and yet seemed not to advance this seemed to be contrary to my logical conclusion. Right away I saw the parallel with the life of the mystical student. When I looked in the far distance I would almost come to the conclusion that it would be better to just stop. For even when I concentrated on every step and kept an eye on the end, I seemed not to make progress in any manner.

What then kept me going? A number of deliberations. In the first place I had gone that road before and knew that finally I would end up at the end. I also recognized that it was my knowledge of the principles of time and space which should not make me doubt. In many similar circumstances I had been able to perceive that the progressing eventually leads to a goal. I intentionally do not say 'the' goal, and I shall come back to the why of that in a minute. Thirdly I had taken refuge to a certain skill to measure my progress. Whilst I walked down the street and took step after step without achieving success I decided to look over my shoulder while going on. And behold, there was a big piece of road behind me. That was the proof that indeed results were made. With it my inquiry had not yet finished. I realized that when I kept my view on the horizon all the time, not only did I not make any progress seemingly, but it also caused frustration. And something had to be done about it.

This is why I kept telling myself that on my way I should not look in the distance, but should keep my gaze on my immediate surroundings. I imagined that I met all kinds of interesting people, that I went into a conversation with them and that this happened meter after meter. Whilst I thus kept my long route rather passable I appreciated that the mere attempt of it had brought me progress, for before I knew it the horizon was within reach. This was also my initial purpose, but because this purpose by and by became an expedition rather than a normal journey and on the way changed its shape and meaning, what I had strived after had been 'a' purpose rather than 'the' purpose. It had little to do anymore with the original manner that I had in mind for walking this path. The real teaching that I have derived from all this, is that you had best aimed for results that have to deal with the here and now. And look backward now and then. Then you will find that you have really made progress.

73. Going astray is human

The Romans knew what they did when they used a language in which the words could be interchanged and could still keep their significance. But this significance could also change, and as if they knew that - later - on the other side of the ocean with the Aztecs there too would reign a great passion for mystification by means of the language, the Romans left it to each other to guess the intention of their complicated sentences, to extract from them the meaning that possibly was laid into them, and to pave the way to a communication that foremost seemed to be of importance within politics. To say what one does not want to say, not wanting to say what one says, not to say what one wants to say, not to want what one says, to say what one does not want, not to say what one wants, not to say what one does not want.

Is going astray human? When it is about a Wanderschaft - the going through mountains and valleys and jungles with anticipation, in hopes of finding a hidden treasure - it seems to be a typically human quality. The quest for hidden things (which indicates an inclination that is the source of all science), for that which reveals the secret that man himself is, constitutes part of the human nature, which is aimed at expansion. That his quest sometimes leads him astray is inevitable. Mistakes are inherent in working. It is not possible to lead a life in which everything goes along paved ways, even if one calculates every step in one's life as careful as possible. Not everything bends to our will; this is why striving after a risk-free life will bring with it a risk of its own: that of manipulation. For, manipulating other people is a means of neutralizing the opposition that one might experience by them. He who does not manipulate, could of course start leading a passive life, in which he has kept all of his potential abilities simmering, in hopes of not attracting attention and not making mistakes. Such a condition of inertia involves no risk. But can we call this 'life'? It is the exploring of the secrets of life that has led to great discoveries (manipulations) which in the arts and sciences have brought mankind beautiful things. Making mistakes and errors is part of that. Going astray is human. In common parlance we say: "To err is human." There is a clear distinction between these two. Going astray is related to a choice on a higher intentional, conceptual level. Erring takes place on a lower level. That going astray is of a higher level, is relative and must not be understood in the sense of 'morally more correct'. If this were different it would be better to go astray with regard to decisions about life and death, than to err in for instance the choice of clothing and food. But the reverse is not valid: that, because the choice of food takes place on a rougher level than a choice on a moral level, it is better to make a wrong choice on the lower than on the higher level. In every sphere we can make fatal mistakes. But we can also create beauty.

It is often supposed that when something takes place on a psychological, mental level, it therefore is of a higher order than what manifests itself physically. That something takes place on the mental plane however is no guarantee that it is of a lovely nature. That somebody has been inspired from a mental level, does not mean that this automatically brings with it better choices or that his insights are positive, for that depends on the sort of level that he is attuned to. We make choices that are characterized by our nature and its limitations and peculiarities. We have a broad range of choices and make mistakes accordingly. But our good decisions come forth from our nature also and from the levels that we attune to. By the way, when using the term 'attuned' in the general sense, I take the departure from its positive shape. When others judge us we hope that they take into account that we are multi-levelled persons, with tendencies to go astray, but also with refined elements in other parts of our nature. Suppose that we should

describe our own person to anyone who does not know us. We might have to draw several personality descriptions. The one seen from the view of the majority of our friends, the other from the majority of our family members, yet another from the majority of our colleagues et cetera. We have many personalities and nobody outside ourselves can have an overall view of them. The rather accurate description always comes from a majority of such a group of people, not from separate members of these groups. We could make a number of descriptions of whom we are, number them from one to a hundred and then range them after what we think is the most accurate description of our real inner being, up to the (almost) faulty descriptions of our outer personality layers. Only someone who would know us very precisely, could describe us in a way that we would consider the most accurate one. Only we ourselves would be the ones to complete the picture, to give with it the unique and true definition of whom we really are.

We cannot be radiant personalities in every circumstance of life. A spiritual teacher once said: "Do what I say, don't do what I do." This is something to remind us that we may be wise and enlightened even though we may make mistakes. We never know how much effort a person exerts to live up to his own principles and to the insights that became his through his attuning to his inner self. It would be unjust to judge him only by his deeds. I think that when somebody shares with us the positive insights that were his during times of enlightenment (no steady state thing but a process), we will be helped when we adhere to these insights, even if the mind of such a teacher at times is blurred, like all our minds are blurred at given moments.

74. A philosopher

Once upon a time there was a philosopher. It was not just one of those philosophers, for he lived in a big forest and despite that, did not call himself a hermit. And another reason not to call him just another philosopher was, that he had himself questioned by those who passed his little cabin. Really worthy of mention however is that he answered those questions by putting a number of questions himself. Not through a real counterquestion, but by repeating the questions of the traveller exactly and ruminating about them aloud. For instance if the traveller asked him: "Is there a beginning or an end?", the philosopher answered: "Is? 'Is' is present tense. Must we then not also ask whether there was a beginning or an end? And how does it relate to beginning or end that is?" Then he continued: "There? Is 'there' beginning or end? If there would be an end, would it not be unlimited, instead of being there? A? Whether there is 'a' beginning or end? How can beginning or end be determined or undetermined? Beginning? End? Who determines what beginning is, if he does not know what end is? Does not the one make the other the condition of its existence?"

Anyway, it is clear that this approach caused the greatest astonishment with all who sought shelter with him when passing through. Years went by and the actual monologue that the philosopher delivered for the confounded or already somewhat seasoned visitors rippled on. One day a young man came by. In the inn in the village he had heard something about the hermit - for that is what he was in fact - and decided to honour him with a visit for a while, for at the time he did not have very many other plans. The young man was curious about what he might be able to learn, but was not yet in the stage that he wanted to yield without striking a blow. On the other hand he wanted to avoid that he entered into a confrontation with the old philosopher. A happy method to prevent this he found by completing his entrance in complete silence. The philosopher had grown accustomed to many things and for the rest was in such remote spheres with his thoughts that he was not surprised by it, but the problems did not completely fail to occur. The old man, to whom orating had become second nature, ought to be given some fuel for this of course. It was denied him by his pupil. It goes without saying that the old man had to get used to that. Sometimes he heard words only in his mind, already opened his mouth to answer, but then came to the conclusion that his guest had not spoken at all. Now, silence is not unpleasant, but for him who has for years filled it with his own philosophies, it is not easy to be compelled - through lack of cooperation - to be silent. The philosopher was not overpleased with it.

Now and then the silence became too hard for the young man, for he too was the victim of the strategy that he himself had chosen. At such weak moments sometimes a sentence escaped him, like at the moment that he asked the philosopher: "Do you want to eat?" As in a reflex the latter said: "Want? Someone inquires after my will. I can refuse or agree. But is not my will bound already by having to choose between those two, now that you ask me that question? If you had not asked me anything, my will would not have been at stake. You? Is it 'me' who wants to eat? Do I then strengthen the inner or rather the outer human being? Eat? How can I say yes or no to something that has only been described half and not in a concrete way, as if when someone asks another person if he loves people, whilst there are so many kinds of them that each of them evokes another answer?"

In this manner quite a lot of months went by unnoticed. The young man learned, by being silent and by reflecting on the occasional things that were said by the philosopher. The latter, whose

counterquestions served more as a cloak than as a mask, acquired his lessons through the fact that his pupil asked him so little. The time came that the young man had to travel along. He did not want to leave without thanking the philosopher, but neither did he want to break with his principle that he did not want to provide the old man with too much firewater. He decided therefore to bow for his master on the last day and simply announce that he was going to depart. After he had bowed he said no more than: "Now I go."

After this he departed. Shaken the philosopher watched him as he went through the valley. Whilst the tears ran into his eyes, he automatically murmured his socratic litany: "Now? Is not the 'now' of today, 'yesterday' tomorrow? And is not yesterday's 'now', 'yesterday' today? How comes that tomorrow is not 'now'? Go? If going is a movement, how then can it take place *nów*? Or in which indivisible moment does the going come about? I? Is it not only our outer shape that goes and does not just the inner self remain immobile?" But the inner self of the ascetic hermit remained not at all motionless at that moment. Whilst more and more he lost sight of his pupil who continued walking over the declivities of the landscape, the old teacher silently called in himself: "Now I go?" "Now I go?" It became visible that also in this old man time had struck its wounds. Whilst his asking call became more and more audible, he suddenly felt remarkably young. "Now I go? "Now I go?" The irreversible of the situation came through to him. He had left his worn out path and trodden on a new one. When he reached out his one hand into the distance and covered his eyes with the other one, he was for the first time since ages able to react without a question from the outside. Whilst heaven stood still for a second, he weepingly called: "Who answers? Who answers ...?"

75. The Company (I)
(freely rendered from the Decamerone)

In a certain century people in whose region the plague had broken out, found refuge in a castle in Italy. The castle was the property of one of them. Fortunately it was equipped enough, for the company to see some time out there, for returning to the villages was not possible. Who knows how long the contagious disease would still rage ... Because it was winter and the darkness fell early, it seemed a good idea to the landed proprietor to think of something that could keep the company busy for the coming evenings. After some mutual consultation one got round to choose someone of them each night, who should tell the assembled companions in adversity a story. Because those present had not by mere accident attained each other's company but were connected by special ties, there was attached a special condition to the contents of the stories that were to come. They ought to be related to the profession of the narrator and moreover be of a mystical nature. Although most members of the company knitted their brows after hearing this aggravating limitation, they were so well versed in the nature of exalted affairs that the plan was accepted with assenting nods. Thus the first evening arrived on which, shined upon by softly flickering candlelight, one was gathered round the fire of the fireplace in the main hall. In the company there were several simple craftsmen, but also noblemen. A company in short that one would not easily get together, were it not, as we already heard, that it was united by special bonds. And that this is so, appeared from the stories of each of them. From the company a baker was appointed to speak first. Whilst everybody leaned back comfortably, he put a rose in a vase and began to narrate ...

"My profession is that of a baker. What I am going to tell you, beloved friends, is how I make my bread and pastry. But when you hear me talking do remember that I am also talking about myself. Early in the morning when everybody is still asleep I set to work. When I look out of the window, I am very aware that everything is still in rest. All my clients are still in dreamland. Although they may not be aware of it at that moment, later on they will make the decision to buy a loaf from me. So I have to go about my job for the sleeping ones.

Before I can accomplish something my oven has to be turned on. To that end I have to give it fuel. My oven can digest any fuel; I just should not add too much of it, otherwise it gets overheated. If I do it well, it remains at a constant temperature and the product that it provides will be as desired. When the oven is well warmed, I can start baking. Of course I have then filled all kinds of loaf tins and made pastry. There is no sense in stoking an oven that is used for nothing. When I let all things heat carefully, the first reward is mine already. Although the oven doors are closed, gorgeous scents rise through which I am totally encircled.

I always have the propensity to open the oven doors during the baking process, because I am impatient. If I manage to control myself everything goes well; if I want to look at the result hastily, failure is the result. After the time has expired that I cannot shorten, the doors may be opened. The scent which was lovely already, is now overwhelming. That which has been baked is ready. In my apprentice period I found that sufficient. But the master baker from whom I learned the craft, imparted to me that it is all about finishing. Everybody may want to buy a loaf, but if I want people to come to me especially for my product, I have a long way to go. Therefore I let it cool down for a while. When it was still in the oven, it was so close to its source that it was unreachable for human hands; one would get burned on it. Now that it has assumed the

temperature of its environment it is enjoyable and more approachable for everybody. It may however keep something of its original warmth. That way everybody likes it the most. When I want to make the bread really nice, I apply a thin layer of sugar icing to it. Then it is really special. My product is loved by each of my customers. Prepared before cockrow, having come about in heat, having been cherished with the power of reasoning, it has in love arrived where it had to be. In me my innate circumspection fought with the desire to speed up the process. The urge to prematurely behold the result I fought with the weapon of my innate patience. And at moments of the greatest temptation, in me the craftsman kept the upper hand."

The baker took his seat and wiped his fat forehead with a big red handkerchief. It was quiet as a mouse. The lord of the castle rose, here and there extinguished a candle and softly wished everybody good night. Each of them sought out his room in silence and thus the first evening came to an end ...

76. The Company (II)
(freely rendered from the Decamerone)

The morning after the evening on which the baker had related his story, one could find in the park around the castle all kinds of members of the company. It seemed as if everybody was preparing for the coming event, where anew a guest would acquit himself of the set task. The one had retreated in an arbour, equipped with pen and paper, the other could be found on an isolated spot whilst he was murmuring and rehearsing on his own. When finally the evening had fallen as far that the cosy fire in the grate could be kindled, everybody assembled in the main hall with tense expectancy. The chatelain in the meantime had joined the company and got up to speak. He asked everybody to agreeably install themselves and handed the floor over to one of those present.

The man who rose was of a tall build. He wore a grey jerkin, from which with trembling hands he conjured up a paper on which he had already prepared his text. The light was dipped. When the man began to speak, candleflames threw the shine of the softly shaking paper in his hand intensified in hundredfold on the ceiling and walls of the hall. "Dear fellows, for a great number of years now, I practise the profession of a sculptor. When I was little, the shapes that I managed to produce from the clay already fascinated me. Those were no more than ever changing, shapeless figures, but despite the limitations that were still imposed on my infant mind I felt attracted to introducing changes. Whilst my little hands elatedly slapped on the clay and I was glad with any change, I could not realize that this activity would become my life's work.

When I grew up I got sculpting classes and made myself familiar with certain techniques. With that I also changed inwardly. For although I appeared to be very much attracted to shaping and transforming, I had in a way detached myself from the careless way in which from one day to the next I worked as a child. When I realized this for the first time, I was worried. Soon however I recognized, that a deep and more quieted down joy had replaced the insouciance of my early work. After all I still worked with great pleasure on my sculptures and I did not lack keenness either. My creations changed too. Not only because they got a structure that as a child I had not been allowed to apply. More and more I got the feeling that with each moulding and modelling I already saw the shape as it would come about. I already saw it in an invisible realm, and what I did was bringing it with love into the visible realm.

When I was at work time seemed to stand still. The more the work took shape the more I buckled down to the applying of elaborations. The raw shape more and more hid under the refinements. The image seemed elated when it was fashioned with attention, but it seemed to be grieved when at some time I would be not so observant and left a minute detail uncompleted. When everything was finished and the image was ready in my atelier, I had the feeling that only directed exertion, inspired thoughts and inner passion had made it so beautiful."

The sculptor went to the hearth and carefully laid the sheet of paper on the logs, where it changed into a beautiful flame. With it he demonstrated that a creation in the reverse direction could have an equally beautiful outcome. He took his seat and it was only after they had exchanged thoughts for some hours, that the members of the company sought out their bedrooms
...

77. Reincarnation

We only know little of the laws of nature involved with reincarnation, but things are as they are: in balance with the laws of nature, whether we understand them or not. When we cannot reconcile our view about what is reasonable and just, with what we see around us, it must be our comprehension that is faltering. The laws of nature are not faltering. The phenomenon of reincarnation is difficult to understand and is complex and strongly connected with karma. Should we try to find one idea that can unite all the ideas about reincarnation, we come to it that in essence we are what we inherently must be. Everybody acts consequently to his nature. Therefore we experience things that other types of mind do not experience. But we also set ourselves a target for our lives that other minds never would. We create goals, and with their implementation we determine our course of life. Maybe after our life we continue with making goals, but nobody knows whether that is the case. We find it difficult to image how we would make any conscious decision when functioning on an immaterial level, but this is because we cannot extricate ourselves from thinking about the type of decision that we make with our physical-mental awareness. At any rate we are sure that we have to make decisions on a material level every day, and that their reach is often visible at once. This reach concerns others, but ourselves as well. The notion that there is a causal relation between numberless events in our lives, therefore thrusts itself upon us. And as soon as we have recognized this relation, we shall be inclined to organize our lives in such a manner that we get more grip on it. A conduct that has an unpleasant result for us, will bring us to adapt our behaviour. Somewhere in the remote past, in this combined action between acting and reflection, between the exerting of willpower and making corrections, the human conscience will have come into being. This conscience eventually will lead to us desiring to prevent injustice and repair injustice done by us. The reason why we want that, and the way how we then act, form our moral system. This system is determined very individually for the greater part.

Suppose you have done something wrong and want to make up for it. You may think of a pleasant manner that gives you a nice feeling inside. You might also find a different way, that brings with it feelings of pain. Let us look at an example of the first. If you have not given a person the attention that he or she deserved, and you can no longer make up for this directly, you might go to work in a hospital or children's home. This might give you a pleasant time as well as a chance to symbolically make up for the fact that you have neglected the person mentioned. Now an example of the second situation. It may be that you have taken away some precious thing from somebody, and that you are not in the position to give it back to that person. Therefore you may have decided to give to another person something that is very dear to you. This gift might be of such a nature that you would really feel the loss. At the same time you realize that it is a grand way to symbolically make up for what was wrong in the past. These two types of reaction are essentially alike, because they balance things out. But their effect on our mind can be incomparable. So we can do things willingly to make up for something, and with it we accept if necessary the pain of the loss that comes about through our compensating. At the same time we gain something of great value. The above examples by the way picture a compensation for something that is to be regretted. Needless to say that compensating can also be done for good things, things that we have gained, like health, family, friends, a good family life, a job. Reincarnation and karma are not related to punishment or reward, or to guilt. They have to do with the continuation of existence and with balance. We make decisions that influence our course of life, and the results of our decisions return to us constantly, in the shape

of pleasant or less pleasant perceptions. These can be forced upon us or we can consciously look for them.

The role of planets with reincarnation

Someone asked: "Would reincarnating on another planet be the next step in the evolution of humanity?" This thought is worth pondering upon. In it, the scribe assumes that our planet is of cosmic lesser importance compared to certain other planets. It is interesting to investigate where this viewpoint may have its origin. Possibly it has originated from the ancient thought that the heavens are high up in the sky because, if anything was found outside the earth, it for that reason belonged to the upper spheres, to heaven. In the heavens everything takes place that cannot be realized on earth. Therefore heaven has always been the place to strive after. A place where things are better than in our earthly world, and possibly the place whence the gods came once. In this view everything that lies outside the earth, being unearthly, represents a higher state of being. Nonetheless there is no reason why we should assume that a planet where we would be reborn after our present incarnation, is of a higher nature, nor is there a reason to assume that, when reincarnating on another planet, we are in a higher state of evolution. If we would know that somebody somewhere else in the universe is contemplating his rebirth on another planet in the future - ours that is -, in the assumption that it would offer him a better shelter, destined for higher forms of life, we would hasten to talk that person out of it. Our earth is hardly an example of a place where human understanding and tolerance predominate, and that we would want to recommend to someone who has already won his spurs on another planet. If the human body serves as the material vehicle for the soul personality, there is no reason why one could not on any planet continue with one's evolution. Such a planet ought to be suited of course to express a soul personality physically, and need not in some or other way be destined for evolved personalities that leave a lower place of evolution. In mysticism growth is measured by the way how the student adapts to any circumstance, regardless where it exists, what it involves and how it manifests itself. With that, the place where one's incarnation takes place, is of relatively minor importance.

It is a fact that we are used to contemplate the present universe, with its countless planets. The existing reincarnation theories all relate to a universe as it is now. Suppose that the universe goes through Big Bang stages. After a Big Bang then, this universe would have to build up new planets from scratch. For a very long time there would be no place where soul personalities can reincarnate. Mystical theory just has no answer to this yet and should be elaborated to fit this type of cosmological concepts, or to foil them. If Big Bangs take place and the soul personalities of the pre-Big Bang period maintain their existence, then this existence will of necessity have to occur on a nonphysical plane. This has consequences for theories regarding the duration of the stay of soul personalities on the cosmic plane between two incarnations. But we do not know how the physical and nonphysical planes influence each other and are intertwined, and whether they could function without their pendant at all being in existence.

Is reincarnating efficient?

Somebody asked: "Would it not be easier to maintain the body we have now instead of passing

through transition and coming back again to repeat the basics of an incarnation, like walking, talking, and learning to think, to name just a few of the challenges?" At the basis of this question possibly lies the point of view that reincarnating implies an effort leading to the using up of energy. In this vision using up this energy moreover is considered a loss of efficiency. We do not like the idea that energy is required for anything that we strive after, and we think that the best way to go about anything and be efficient, would be, not to put too much energy in it. Efficiency in its meaning that little to no energy is spent, is in our universe in everyday life of importance, simply because it is cheap and easy. However, if we apply the viewpoint that considers inefficiency to be the nonoptimum use of energy, to reincarnation, how then should we establish what efficiency in that field means? Who can tell if the continuing cycles of life are inefficient and could have been run more efficiently? But there is more to this question. In a way an incarnation can be considered inefficient if the person involved unnecessarily hampers his development, thus causing the repetition of certain situations in next incarnations. But, this vision transposes earthly, 'economical' deliberations to a sphere of which we hardly begin to sound the patterns. We do not know how to indicate why it would be better to learn a certain thing now instead of in the future. Nor do we know how inadequacies of the one incarnation affect the other. And what if certain developments are directed from a higher level than that of the soul personality, so that the making of judgments on efficiency becomes impossible?

According to some method of logic the utmost form of efficiency seems to be: do not live, lest you should have to die; do not grow, lest you should fall apart in the end et cetera. So only if every movement in the universe would stop, even on the atomic level, we would have reached the utmost efficiency. But, efficiency is a human word for a state in which the benefits are weighed against the disadvantages. This weighing is subjected to the limitations of the human brain, even of the human intuition, and is changing dependent on the point of view that we take. There are many levels and interpretations of efficiency, and of the meaning of a benefit or a disadvantage. I think that we cannot possibly understand what efficiency means on the highest planes of consciousness.

The order of incarnating

Someone asked: "Does mystical theory have anything to say about the order of our incarnations? By this I mean since time is illusory must we incarnate in sequential order?" Whatever possibilities there are, there is always 'a' consciousness that is aware of 'a' situation regarding ourselves. As if we are standing in the middle of a circle, with all around us incarnation images, that we can perceive. There is also a viewpoint that departs from linear reincarnating (forwards) or reincarnating backwards, which is then also linear. Someone once even spoke about 'side-ways'. Even if our mind would once and for all establish whether incarnating happens along linear or nonlinear lines, this would only indicate how our mind sees reality, not actuality. We can also try to imagine that instead of us travelling through time - experiencing our lives during consecutive centuries - we on the contrary remain motionless, whilst our inner self projects experiences onto our mind. We are standing still and the images move along the screen of our awareness.

Where do the souls come from?

A well-known question is: "If we reincarnate would not the population of the world keep the same magnitude because we come back into the same world? Where do all the extra people (soul personalities) come from? Is the earth the only place where we reincarnate?" This essential question I have heard many a time over the years. With our reasoning we cannot fully understand the laws involved, but by making comparisons we can try it anyway. We might imagine the cosmos to be a sphere of fire. Any time that we keep a match near the fire, the match will ignite. It is like the body, that is inflamed or ignited by the life giving principles, so that we talk about a human being with a soul personality. After having been ignited the match leads a life of its own, manifesting a small fire, that as to its nature is related to the sphere of fire. We may ignite one match, a thousand matches or ten billion matches; all this time the fiery ball remains the same. It will not be diminished. As long as there are nonfireball elements (matches: the material elements, forming a body), a 'personality' can be manifested: the human being with its little inside flame. There are many occasions where the human mind can learn and acquire experience. There is no reason to assume that it is of importance on what planet this takes place. The example with the candle means to say, that on the spiritual level it is possible for somebody to give light and yet retain his own light. It is as if I give you light with my candle. Your candle will then have a burning light and mine will still have its own light. Regarding reincarnation we accordingly say, that spiritual light (the invisible part of manifestation), can vitalize matter limitlessly.

Now, does this mean that there will always be more soul personalities incarnating, in proportion to light finding more suited matter? And does this also mean that the number of souls incarnating in the future is limited to the amount of physical matter available in the universe? And can the light remain outside the limitation of the body after this body has extinguished? Why would not the light disappear then, be blown out? After all, it is only a small, secondary light separated from the great light and, in this comparison, no longer fed by it. And why does this small light reincarnate? Must we perhaps reconsider the example with the match, because fire can also make a transition to a newer or different level of energy and is not just transmitted on the same level? The difficulty with metaphors is that they are always connected with other things which again lead to other metaphors. Any comparison won't hold. Therefore a metaphor is only useful to grasp the outer limits of what can be understood of some issue. So actually it is difficult to answer any of these questions well. Our theorizing can only to some extent describe reality; not actuality. When it must be established which quantity of tangible matter is needed to be the vehicle for countless soul personalities it is obvious that our understanding of physics is not complete. But there is a basic principle. When a lens is placed before a source of light it will spread this light in a specific manner. Regardless how many times we repeat this, the result will be the spreading of the beam, a distortion if you will. This is inherent in what we have been doing: placing a lens before a source of light. When there is no lens available the described specific result will not be realized. Yet it is still a fact that if we had had a lens, and if we had had a source of light, the combination of the two had led to a specific result. The question whether the light source for its spreading of light is dependent on there being lenses available, is of a different order. The principle remains: if there is a lens, and if there is a source of light, the process can be repeated. Possibly this also goes for the soul personalities, in the sense that when there is matter sensitive enough to express a soul principle, this expression does actually take place. Then there never is a shortage or surplus of soul personalities.

Reunion after this life

Shall we see again our old loved ones after our death? Many people take the view that in a next life they will find again a beloved person that they have lost sight of or from whom they have been separated. But what if that other person (man or woman) still in his present earthly life has found a new partner in life, who also takes the view that when he undergoes a separation he will find that person at his side again in a new life? How does it go when in our series of lives we have had a lot of loved ones? To which loved one will we then return? And how can we see again all those other old acquaintances? Can we only make room for them in one single incarnation for some period of time, after which we lose sight of them again? Behind the conception that we see a beloved one again after this life or in a next life, is the thought that energetically he makes up such an important part of whom we are, that he becomes a part of our self. We would not be complete should we not see him, or her, again. Yet we must realize, that in our life thousands of people play or have played a bigger or smaller part. There are very superficial contacts that can yet influence our life strongly, and there are prolonged contacts that contribute little to the daily state of affairs in our life or to the way how we develop ourselves. And there are superficial contacts that have no demonstrable influence, and long-standing contacts that appear to be fundamental. If all those people together help filling in our life they have a function. Yet we will not expect to see them all again in a next life. On the other hand we do expect that we see again the people who have had a great influence on our mind, our emotions and our personal development. Where then must the division exactly be made, and who brings about this division, this selection? Is it not illogical that we think that only the group of people to whom we are positively and emotionally very attached will be together with us in a next life, and others will not? Perhaps it never occurred to us that besides this small group of people the other ones, whom we may dislike, may return to us also. If it is true that only a special group of people returns in our new life, there obviously are energetic inner and outer circles, and then we only see again the ones who for us form the inner circle, be they good or bad. We may have no influence on this, for neither do we always have this influence in our visible, material existence. Also, a limited return of persons means that the outer circles in a way come about very randomly. They form some kind of pattern, but we have no conscious influence on it. Yet those superficial contacts take place continuously. Somehow they must relate to our fields of energy, for as a fact we do attract them. An indication for this is, that also superficial contacts can very dominantly continuously determine our life, and may even thwart our life in an extremely annoying manner. For good reason we say that some people always attract the good people, or the wrong ones. There are people who continuously are robbed or maltreated in the street, are always conned by a third party, are always the victim of something. If it is charted who are the causers of their misery, it are most often complete strangers, who in the life of that kind of persons turn up as a ghost in the night and then disappear from it again. If we are not hampered by the superficial contacts in our life, there obviously is a harmony in our existence that enables us to mainly concentrate on other affairs, core matters. This must have to do with whom we are and with what we radiate. Actually the fact that a handful of people is very close to us in our life does blur the fact that there are many more people, who are at the periphery of our life and yet fulfil a function there that we could not do without. We buy articles in a shop and are helped by a mostly anonymous person. We travel by train but do not even see the engine driver who takes us to our destination. We fill in forms, and somewhere in town in a building unknown to us,

an official unknown to us carries out an action that may be of great importance to our well-being. All these people to a great extent determine what our life looks like. But we often concentrate on our family, our friends and acquaintances.

Irrefutably a very small group of people is of very great, positive importance in our lives. But if it would appear that we would never see them again later, their role in our cycles of incarnations would yet prove to be limited, that is, might not necessarily range over more incarnations. Emotionally this would be a hard finding for us. For why then would we have been emotionally so connected with them? Perhaps because in every life, on the basis of the dominant and less dominant energies in our person, there will always be crystallizations in images that for us work out as inner and outer circles, with all the possible, ever changing shapes that are its result.

How do we recognize impressions from former incarnations?

Although there are methods to develop ourselves in such a way that we are open to impressions of a spiritual nature, no esoteric school can determine for us whether our impressions relate to past incarnations. The best way to handle this, is to look at other impressions that we have. When is an impression of such a nature that we just know it represents the truth? What makes it different from other impressions that we have? Then we apply this measure to impressions of a reincarnation kind. In our memory we will find events when there was no doubt about what was happening to us. This inner certainty is the only measure.

78. The king

Once upon a time there was a rich king. Because he could permit himself to be idle to his heart's content that is what he did of course. After some time he was really getting fed up with it, and he looked for ways to escape his boredom. He summoned the old wise man who far away in his kingdom led a secluded existence, and that such a man is found inside each and every kingdom, should already then have been an omen to the king. Anyway, the old sage came and on the request of the king he imparted to him the principles of mysticism. The king was instructed regarding cause and effect, reincarnation and the quest for the purpose of life. He had received the lessons of the wise man for only just a couple of times, or he already less minded his royal duties. It was clear to him that two things would occupy him from now on. The first was to look for a way to be able to safeguard his treasures for his next incarnation. The other to look for the purpose of his life. The pupils among you presume, the sages among you know, and the initiates among you understand, what the misconception of this king was, but let us not get ahead of the story.

The king immediately had all the treasurers of his country appear before his throne, and ordered them to transport to a remote place all the gold, the jewels, the treasures that he possessed. Because the king had learned that one is what one thinks, he shortly after that began to concentrate daily on the hidden treasury. He held the view that if he would devote a large part of his life to visualizing the storage space, it would without much problems come back to mind in his next incarnation, thus guaranteeing him in the following life the wealth that seemed so very enjoyable to him already in the present day.

Month after month, yes, even for many years, the king went into his turret room in solitude, and imagined how he, in the uncertain future, could secure for himself a certain wealth, which after all was nothing but his present privilege. With the one half of his thoughts ever residing in the future, his majesty manifested the other half on the earthly plane, because, as he had been taught after all, one should maintain a balance in everything. Therefore, how much he liked to alternate the efforts in the field of his future wealth with the quest for the purpose of present life. Because the king with all this had a cheerful character and did not treat his subjects unfair, although he deprived them of his attention, the old wise man beheld with forgiving surprise the king's attempts to master the present and the future. Not infrequently however the old man made his way to his hermitage and moved asked himself whether something was wrong with his way of tuition. When then the holy man received the answer from the inside, he was reassured. Then he devoted himself again to teaching his mild-foolish royal pupil, who was so close to his heart.

The king, searching for the purpose of life, continuously thought that he had found the answer, but was disappointed time and again. Having come to the end of his life he decided to give up his quest. After he had signed his testament and leaned back in the pillows, he had acquired so much quiet that for the first time in all those years something whispered to him that the purpose of his life could be revealed to him now: the quest had been of such vital importance to him, that seeking the goal equalled the goal. The king now understood, that every set purpose determines the meaning of an incarnation. Thus he died, in profound peace. When after a long time he incarnated again, he found himself in a humble position, and again and again he felt that somewhere on this earth a big treasure was hidden for him. Year after year this simple man tried to unriddle the secret of the peculiar thought of a richness that he, living austere as he did, was

not really in need of. Isolated from the world he devoted himself to the quest after the purpose of his life, and after the origin of the thought of hidden treasures. Thus about his person a warm aura of inner warmth developed, that no longer left his side. When he was old, there was a knock on his door one day and, surprised about the visit of a stranger to his remote cabin, he opened up. It was a herald of the then ruling king, who summoned him to the palace, from the old man to receive tuition in the mystical laws ...

79. The art of living

Within a club of writers, where in rotation we assigned each other a subject to be treated, once the theme of 'the art of living' was brought up. I was enthusiastic about it for a second, but in no time at all I was disappointed. The art of living? Why was this word at once unengaging to me? Because it reminds of wisdom on tiles, of homespun philosophy. Apart from that, there is nothing wrong with the notion 'the art of living', might one say. Or is this kind of notions constantly on the lips of the Occidental? The English language knows the concept 'artisan', this means: a specially trained craftsman. The craftsman is trained in a particular direction. In a way every human being is an artisan. He has picked up the art of life, of living, with ups and downs, and through his education and tuition has been trained to deal with life and to survive. I have seen art described as 'the use of the imagination to make things of esthetical significance'. In this definition not the tuition is at the centre stage, but the ability to use the imagination to create something. In a broad perspective everybody who tries to make something esthetic of his life is an artisan. Now we are getting closer to the concept of the art of living.

When we use the imagination to create esthetically significant things, this seems - under normal circumstances - not to be an extraordinary accomplishment. When all goes well, it is not so difficult to make the best of what you have got. Only when things go wrong, when you are abandoned, have nothing to eat, have to make shift with less than you need to survive, only then it is going to count what you do. The art of living seems to be connected with how to maintain oneself under the most difficult circumstances. Under optimum conditions there is nothing clever in living, in both meanings of the word. Now the image of a human being comes to life who under abominable circumstances - for instance war or persecution, the staying in a concentration camp, the losing of everybody dear to you - remains capable of creating esthetically significant things. It is not said that the esthetic is 'beautiful': it is significant. Therefore a war photographer can make art, but his use of the imagination is not beautiful.

When I think of a master in the art of living, I think of the mother who under harrowing circumstances still manages to organize a nice birthday party or Christmas eve for her children. Who knows she may have been plagued by worries about it for weeks, but she breaks through the deep darkness by creating a sphere (literally: a ball) of light, in which everything is save. Or I think of the mother who knows that she is going to die with her child, and gives it the last peace of food, in hopes of her child surviving her. That is what I call the art of living.

I know that there are people who are very keen on adopting the title of master in the art of living, but - with that - back the wrong horse grossly. They confuse *savoir-vivre* with epicurianism. The master in the art of living is somebody totally different from the hedonist. The latter at best is someone who aspires to an exuberant way of living, and what is so sublime about that, so esthetically significant or even beautiful, not to mention worth pursuing? He who wants to cloak himself with the aureole of man of the world and tries to pass for a master in the art of living, all too often makes a poor show. The art of living does not consist of constantly chasing the women and being drunk. You cannot even call that exuberant anymore; it is downright pathetic. Even the flamboyant personality is reputed to be a refined but intemperate hedonist. No, he is not by definition a master in the art of living. For me the art of living is the ability to moderately and with distinction use the sources that are at one's disposal. It is the ability to draw on sources, and not to deplete sources. It is the capability to remain focussed on the positive under all circum-

stances. It is the ability to never give up and to always give yourself for more than a hundred percent, even if everything goes against you. Masters in the art of living are difficult to find. Most of the time they are mothers.

80. A beautiful life

Once upon a time there was somebody who said to himself: "I would like to get into a real heaven and if there is none, I would not mind planning one myself." In the existing heaven, where one is always very understanding, this thought had been followed with a deliberate interest. So often already had it occurred that the human mind had created a new world (yes, that some had created heaven or hell on earth), that not a single earthly initiative was held to be odd or unwieldy. It was decided to send the young man an envoy. The latter arrived in the material spheres and went to find the young man. How this goes about, is part of the mysteries. Do not be puzzled by this, for in every world hidden laws prevail. After having localized the young man, the herald went to the man's cabin that was situated on a mountain slope. When he had arrived there and had duly presented himself, the messenger said to him: "We have learned of your deeply felt longing to create a heaven as you have always had it in mind. After consideration in our present heaven we deem it right to enable you to give us a detailed sketch. But first of all we would like to hear from you in a broad outline what you understand by heaven. Next how you would move there and what you would undertake should you be put into the position to reside there."

Well, the young man was highly surprised that the cosmic council entrusted him with such an enterprise, for, let us be fair, the existing heaven was already there since angel memory and all the circumstances should now be there to make it a pleasant place. The young man began to doubt himself vaguely and not without a restless feeling he started a conversation with the messenger. In their exchange of thoughts many issues were dealt with, but heaven was scarcely discussed. From time to time both, by way of pausing, walked out of the cabin. And only the owls could then perceive the two silhouettes that were quietly standing on the mountain side by side, staring aimlessly. A light haze filled the valley and when they exhaled at the brim of the ravine, where they had halted, the cold vapour of their breath shaped a cloud up to many centimeters in front of them. Then they went inside again. The principal topic of conversation remained the life that the young man had lived up to then. What had kept him busy? What events had made an impression on him? Was he happy and what did he understand by that? The mild interrogation repeated itself into the small hours. The messenger departed, but this was just before it was dawning. The only thing that he had left behind was the order to the young man to make a general sketch of a heaven according to his own liking.

The morning after, the young man closed the door of his little cabin behind him and began a long journey to think about the proposal. He travelled across a number of countries and went through inhabited, but also through inhospitable, desolate areas. When the young man had considered further, he imagined how he would behave in the heaven that he wanted to create for himself. When he had also made this step, he returned to his cabin. His views were crystallized out. And he jotted down: 'In the first place heaven must be a place where one need not suffer. There must be an eternal equability of the mind. Furthermore not one single being ought to be after the life of another being'. This is how he complied with the first condition of the cosmic messenger: that the young man should define what heaven meant to him.

One evening as a matter of course the cosmic messenger appeared in his cabin to inquire after his blueprint of the new heaven. "Well", said the young man, "in the first place there may be no hunger and sorrow, only equability. Furthermore it is my wish that every being lives there on

equal terms. At least, to me that seems a good point of departure." "I have taken due note of your words", spoke the heavenly messenger. "Are you ready now to indicate how you would behave in that heavenly abode?" "I am", said the young man, "I did give that matter considerable thought. I then imagine that one fine day I enter and am shined upon by an eternally shining, mild sun. Not too hot. It does not rain. I must be able to go and stand as I please, no matter what happens. When I walk around, I see the wild animals standing in the meadow next to the sheep. None of the sheep is lacerated. When I walk on, the birds come flocking down from the sky. They only need to come to me and must not be obliged to look for their food, and I cast some bread to them. To me everything looks pretty peaceful that way. I am never tired in heaven, never need to go to bed and can live on quite nicely. Every day I must have plenty to eat. This in short seems to me the ideal heaven."

"I took note of it", said the cosmic messenger and whoever knew him longer would have noticed the worried gleam that for a second appeared in his eyes. "I shall bring your proposals and ideas up for discussion on our first coming cosmic meeting", he continued. "However, count on it that it may take a long time before you hear from us how we think about your plans, for the wheel of the cosmic makes slow revolutions. Also be mindful that our answer will come to you in a different manner than you expect."

Tens of years went by. One day the man felt that he was going to die and feeling secure as to the cosmic not having forgotten him he expired. When he woke up he came to the realization where he had arrived. When he had become habituated to his new environment, he went a little way into the heaven. Soon he reached a valley, in which flowers, birds, wild and tame animals were found, the sun brightly shone, he no longer became tired and the animals were seemingly feeling comfortable. Still there was something odd about everything that he encountered on his path. Every animal and every plant showed him, when he had come into touch with them, a ribbon with words of the same purport. The one time he read: 'This is temporary'. The other time: 'See through me', or 'See the seamy side'. The sun showed him a sign with the text 'Temper my heat'. After this had been going on for a while, the heavenly messenger appeared on the sandy path on which the man found himself at that moment. "Sit down, friend", said the messenger, "and have a good look." The man, glad that he had met somebody and even his familiar conversation partner whom he had not seen for a long time, sat down on a rock. Thereupon the messenger brushed with his hand over the eyes of the man and as if to indicate that he did not want to let his protégé alone in his experiences, he thereupon also brushed over his own eyes. The landscape got other colours; everything in the environment began to show its true nature. "Now come with me", said the messenger, "and walk back with me." The man stood up and began to walk. "Halt!", called the messenger with a slight reproach. "Look down. Do you see that along the way you have already killed many little creatures with your footsteps and crushed many little plants?" "That is not totally fair", protested the man, "for I have not seen those. And moreover I asked for a heaven without suffering."

"Alas", said the messenger, "it was in your own power to prevent it by standing still, but you have given precedence to your wish to move. The plants that you have trampled on in the bud, should have served many small animals in the field for a meal. The ants and insects made the ground loose, so that the food could grow better. Now both part of the food and the animals is gone. You wanted to be able to go and stand where you preferred, no matter what happens. That you walked along is only the result of your ignorance. Because, before we had arranged a heaven

for you to your liking, the plants and the little animals on the ground still lived. Not we have killed them, you did that yourself. Suffering they do not know however. But let us go on." The man walked on, followed at a few paces by his protector. After having walked on for two days and nights - after all he did not become tired - it struck him that the landscape looked shrivelled. "This is", said the messenger, "because your sun must shine eternally. There is no shower of rain." "I did not know that", said the man. "Yet it is your own heaven", said the messenger. Walking along they saw the birds coming from the sky for food. The man could not give it to them, for grain had not been growing and so no bread was baked. The birds were not mournful, for although they longed for food they were not hungry, and sorrow there was none in this all too human heaven. They did fall weakened to the ground however, wholly satisfied with their inevitable fate. The one after the other died. "But why", asked the man. The messenger answered: "Because only according to the law of longing for food could they answer your own demand. Your pleasure consisted of the feeding of the birds and that is why the cosmic council had to create a desire in the birds too, namely the longing to be fed by you. They could obtain their food only from you. Not from somebody else, for they find themselves in your heaven. And in it there is only room for your own laws, because it should meet your own image in all respects."

Both went silently on through a ragged meadow full with thorny bushes. In the distance the man saw wild and tame animals peacefully in each other's vicinity. After some time the messenger continued, as if the conversation had not been interrupted for a long period: "If your heaven is different from what you have thought, the heaven of the birds must change as well. What you could not see, is that desire is a form of suffering. In order that your desire could be met, suffering had to be created within the birds, but suffering you did exclude. Yet only by a shortage of food could come about in them the desire to be fed by you. And only through meditation could this law have been revealed to you." The man felt dejected and uneasy. "Let me alone for a while then", he said, "then I shall start with this immediately, for I do not want to make the same mistakes over and over again." "That is a noble striving", said the messenger, "but do not forget that you have abolished sleep and wished an unwearied functioning of your body. In it there is no room for sleep nor for meditation." Filled with regret the man shouted out: "What a stupid move have I made!" The cosmic messenger said: "Let us go on, our journey has not yet been completed."

Having arrived at the spot where the man had seen the wild and tame animals standing, he saw the changes there too. The wild animals lay on the ground panting for breath and were skin and bone. The little lambs walked right through them, sniffed here and there at the carcass of a wild animal and quietly continued grazing. "The wild animals", the messenger said, "have been deprived by you of the desire to tear up the lambs. Through that a part of their existence has been taken away that up to now kept them alive. Nobody has given them an inborn desire for other food, and they could not have taken the life of the lambs without causing sorrow, and for a fact this sorrow you have not been willing to allow. You wanted that they were all equal to the other. By taking away suffering you have created other conditions." "I did not know that", said the man conscious of guilt. "Come on my friend", said the cosmic messenger with a lot of compassion. "Your heaven no doubt is different from what you had imagined, but it is your own heaven." "Then I am rather disappointed in it", said the man, "for this I had not wished." "That is not correct", said the messenger. "We had wanted to arrange a heaven for you in which everything would have its balanced place in the wheel of events, where desire and sorrow, joy and disunity, each would be spokes in the wheel of eternal equilibrium. But you have thought you could make

a wheel that would be strong without all the spokes. Think. When you crushed the plants under your feet, you have done so out of ignorance. You had wanted to prevent it, I understand, when you discovered it. But that is not correct either, my friend." The messenger kept standing for some time in contemplation, as if he consulted himself about what he should divulge to the man and spoke: "For only if you should not live you would remain totally fossilized on the spot and harm no animal or plant. And that is not inherent to the purpose for which you have been created. At one side of the road you pick the plants that you will eat in the evening, whilst under your feet you trample other plants. And this is good. For the trampled on plants form the humus from which after some time other food for you and others will shoot up. You are in the heaven that you have created yourself, but be careful. Many a time one has thus created the opposite."

The man leaned against a great boulder and, unable to resist the shame that came over him, he slowly let himself down to the ground. The messenger came standing beside him and whilst the former stretched his hand and with it described an arc over the landscape that lay before them, he said to the man: "Take another good look at this. This heaven is your earth. This creation is human. There will come a time when it will be granted to you to discover what is true, if you know how to yield to it. But for the moment it is not the time for that yet." The man nodded almost invisibly and closed his eyes. On the earth he woke up at that moment in his little cabin at the mountain side, in the land of which we do not know the name. Slowly he began to sit upright. After having recovered himself he walked to the door of his abode, opened it and went outside. There the early-morning mist was about to dissipate. The birds whistled, the flowers swayed to and fro in a mild breeze. The man entered his heaven, now that he had died of an incomplete world view.

81. The breakthrough

Once there was a mystical pupil. He went into the forest. He sought a master. He found a master. He asked the master's permission to stay. He got it. Thereupon he asked to be admitted to the tuition. He was allowed to. For many years he remained in the surroundings of the wise old man. The pupil felt that he himself was getting older and older. This was because he was not yet past the point where the master had been, who felt younger by the day. The pupil felt slightly worried because he could not detect any real progress in himself.

On a hot summer afternoon he set himself next to the master, who had seated himself on a hilly spot at the margin of the forest and who nourished himself in the sun. Behind them lay the forest, in front of them a sloping plane stretched out, over which as a blanket lay shimmering the warmth. After they had glowered over the plane for a while, musing, their eyes half closed in a kind of drowsy vigilance, the pupil asked: "After having been in your presence for a long time, master, I am still looking for what seems to escape me. Should I do the right thing by leaving you?" The master said: "No." "Is it better then for my development to stay a bit longer in your presence." "No again." "But", the pupil hesitated, "shall I do some more meditating? Yes, I really might spend a bit more time on that." "No", the answer was.

A bit confused the pupil now put: "Ah, now you have me. I must meditate a bit less, is it not?" "No", said the master. The pupil began to like it. He began enjoying this philosophical game. "Master, you mean that I must meditate neither more nor less, therefore that I have to stop it altogether?" "No", he got as an answer. "Can it be that I have tried too much to do things well lately?" "No." "It may also very well be that I have neglected other things in my life, to be able to call mine the higher things of life." "No." "Can cosmic illumination ever be attained in one life?" "No." "You mean that it takes more lives?" "No."

...Whether it came through the peacefulness of this conversation, or through the safe and listless warmth that rose up from the valley, it was certain that the questioning and answering seemed to be a timeless event, that neither by the pupil nor his master was experienced as a burden. But now and then there fell a small pause. The master had little lights in his eyes, whilst his pupil tried to formulate new questions. "You must find my questions troublesome?" "No." "You must be thinking: 'I have been young myself too'." "No." "But surely you will not be thinking: 'I have never been young'?" "No." "...But you have been young!" "No."

After a short silence: "You would never want to change places with me, would you?" "No." "Because then you would have to make a step backward." That must be it, the pupil thought after this. "No." "But it would not help you ahead either." "No." "Do you mean that my question is wrongly put, or do you confirm that it would not help you ahead either?" "No", came again the answer. "Then there is nothing more to be asked, I give up." "That is correct", said the master. After a while he left his pupil alone, with a smile on his face.

82. Create your own world

It is a utopian dream to think that human minds understand each other well. This has everything to do with the fact that we, as soon as we discuss a subject with other people, take our departure from definitions that we dig up from our memory. Countless solutions are waiting there, to be subsumed with great pain under a world view in which they do not belong. It may therefore be lazy to at once test everything that comes to us against the things that - concerning that - are present in our memory, if we also have the opportunity to ask the other person what he actually means. Strangely enough, establishing communication with other people can be done despite the biases (the preconceptions). And with that, a communication with which both parties have the idea that they are being listened to. If we do not understand each other well, that which we call an exchange of opinions never reaches the stadium of an exchange of intentions.

We often dig frenetically in our memory for elements that possibly have any relation with what we thought the other person had mentioned. So if I were allowed to create a world of my own, I first and foremost would like to create a human being who can understand someone else. It is ironic. Creating your own world means that you may change all the laws of nature. The limitations that you are faced with are nil. Yet a Utopia desirable or feasible within the present world must still answer to laws of nature. So this is something very different from creating a world for which not one of our prevailing laws of nature can be formulated. A newly to be designed world must remain answering to laws, but they could look different. We might for instance renounce gravity. One may opt for the elementary particles not to gyrate but to be fixed; and for the thoughts of man not to be the result of his lower mind but always of his higher self - not because this can be acquired like in our present world, but as something with which as a human being you start life.

Creating one's own world contains the possibility of reaching complete freedom. At the same time by creating one's own, new world, it is limited by the qualities that we attribute to that world, so that whoever gains his freedom by a unique chance, immediately subjugates himself again. Should we be allowed, with all our limitations, to have the presumption to be able to create a world in which everything corresponds with everything and yet cooperates in harmony? Unless of course we create a world that no longer is dependent on harmony, and reacts chaotically. But would we still have control over that world? Would it be a world that does what we want it to? All our creative actions would at any rate lead to a reaction. How we interpret this reaction depends on our view on life, to such an extent that where someone else might call the reaction conflicting with its cause (which would imply a breach with the laws of nature), we might consider it on the contrary a definite proof of stemming from its cause. This is important. We cannot create a world without knowing what it should be created for. So there always is a connection between the one who creates the creation, and the creation itself. For the shape in which our creation takes place, will coincide with our plans. If this were not the case, then logic and the build of the creation would escape our influence. We would no longer be in the process of creating our own world. We would no longer create it consciously after our image. There must be a purpose of our own behind it, otherwise the world cannot be manifested after our insight. When we create a world of our own, we must shape a conception of it. Must the world be limited or unlimited? It seems no big problem to create a small world. But when we limit this world, we already establish a law of nature, and is not this what we wanted to avoid? Creating an unlimited world on the other hand brings with it the same problem in another shape.

Do we think the number of chemical elements is too big? If we choose a world that only knows ten chemicals, it again forms a limitation. The ten chemicals may be combined, but it will be a limited number of combinations. This inherent limitation is a law that we cannot prevent. Should we eliminate the mathematical laws then we can no longer indicate which things can be built with the ten chemicals. The final result would be unpredictable, chaotic, therefore fall beyond our influence, beyond the order as we can perceive it. Should we want to determine in each case which elements may form which combinations, then there is a limitation again, built by us. The freedom that we claim by doing the one thing, at the same time evokes limitations in other fields. Whatever world we want to build up, it seems that it has to be governed by laws of nature. This has everything to do with creating an environment that is the result of what we imagine. And imagination is closely connected with desire.

When we look around us in the place where we are sitting now, we see that everything that is touched by our eyes is the result of desire. The desire to plan, the desire to build, the desire to construct, the desire to give a clear field for a constructive or creative thought, and to create. Desire is connected with visualization. And visualization is connected with inner powers. Desire in itself is good nor bad. But desire is steered and directed by the will. When we are attuned to nature and feel in harmony with it, our will will comply with it. The answer to the question how we must create our world must come from deep within, as yet not led by rules and regulations. This does not mean that the inner voice will always conflict with regulations. When we are really in harmony we learn to look differently at regulations and they will not always evoke resistance. The more vivid our visualization is, the better the chance that it will materialize. Two things are important with this. Firstly: do we really need what we want? Secondly: can we let it go? After the creative phase there must be the complete no-thing, for only after the letting go it gets the chance to manifest itself. The wishes that we entertain when we want to create a new world are of necessity limited by ourselves, as human beings who have a body and a mind as we know it from ourselves. This is why we always draw from our own experiences, even if we want to design a so-called unique world. It is impossible for us to distance us so much from ourselves that we can create a world that has no ties with ours. Why is the present world framed as it is? Only he who has all the information at his disposal can answer this. But every information would be a part of this same world.

Creating a new world has to do with improvement, an improvement that can extend to our own person. Can a personal improvement be measured though? What is it compared with? Is an improvement visible compared to earlier days? Can we establish whether our old style of living was wrong and have we improved ourselves? Or were we on the right track in earlier days, and could it not surface owing to certain circumstances? Will a total transformation of our personality be triggered through mystical tuition, or are we in our younger years potentially already the mystic who must yet reveal himself later under the right circumstances? For many mystical students it is difficult to establish whether after years they can finally show their true self after having led a life in which they have done many things the wrong way, or whether they have merely learned to rein in this 'wrong' in their personality through erecting a kind of shield around them. Some students come to realize that it is as if they are a highly developed and loving person at the inside, led into constantly changing circumstances. Every situation that seems to darken their light, is only present and visible at the periphery of their personality. It has nothing to do with their true self. As they gain more experience they have the feeling that they grow, but in fact they are shown differing images over and over again, in which beauty is ever

more visible. There never seems to be a moment when they can say that the image that they have of themselves shows their true 'I', for every phase of it seems to be in constant development. Possibly the mind gets to see more and more things, and manages to have itself carried along by the good, through which it perceives and reveals more and more of beauty, and seems to grow, thereby leaving old situations behind it. When we make an electric wire to which we attach all kinds of lamps of different sizes, it is self-evident that they all spread a different light, even if an equal current is sent through the wire that connects them all. It depends on the receiver of the light to what extent the current is reflected that has access everywhere. Daily life can prepare the student for the contact with an inner realm, but it will depend on the quality of his personality, on his willpower, to what extent he can reflect the light with which he seeks contact. And this reflection can be found back in the world that he wants to create for himself and others.

When he succeeds in his endeavour he makes a contribution to the civilized world and spreads light in it. Now the question is what should be understood by 'civilized'. One always says that it is a thin veneer because we quickly lapse into old mistakes, even if we have managed for a long time to avoid those mistakes. Many people therefore are of the opinion that civilization is only a thin veneer with which we cover up our weaknesses. Or does being civilized just imply that we try to contain our weak points and that we do not always manage to? Does a civilized person no longer have certain passions, or is it so that most of the time he manages to put a sharp curb on them, which distinguishes him from an uncivilized person? That civilization is only a thin veneer, is said when somebody from whom we do not expect it, ventures an uncivilized outburst. We feel that someone who behaves civilized must keep this up at all times. For otherwise we feel that during the time that he has behaved in a civilized manner he has only kept up appearances. Whoever is civilized once, will always behave civilized, is then the point of departure. There is also the opinion that real civilization can only lead to more civilization and not to a relapse. This does lay a heavy burden on all of us, for it gives the notion civilization a contents that we seem hardly capable of complying with. What could be the realistic standpoint in this matter? We learn with ups and downs. When we are of goodwill we will time and again exert ourselves to make something beautiful of life, and not let ourselves be thrown off our balance by a temporary relapse. We pick up the pieces and if necessary start all over again. So much the better than that from then on we fail to strive after what we think to be an ideal situation. A positive disposition leads to a civilized life, which is not the same as a life without failures. We are simply not capable of always reining in our weak sides. Civilization does not imply that we no longer have passions, aggression, desires. It implies that we manage to keep them under control mostly. That we lose this control now and then is something we must be prepared to put up with.

As we have seen, creating a new world of our own is connected with ideals, definitions, laws of nature, willpower, civilization. It also is connected with placing situations in a frame that supplies them with a certain meaning, and with projecting. Through this a common situation can change as if it has been touched by a magic wand. When a child gives us a flower the petals of which have almost completely fallen off, and asks us if we like the flower, we will certainly answer in the affirmative. When we would have seen the flower completely isolated from the child, we possibly would have called the flower ugly. But now that the child has offered it to us with all its love, it may become the most beautiful thing in the world. Moreover, the otherwise 'ugly flower' has changed in our mind; we do not even lie to the child, for the flower has actually become something totally different from the isolated flower,

so that we can call the petalless flower beautiful, without even being inaccurate. Love can change everything and even neutralize and transmute an 'inaccuracy' into the truth, on the basis of projection. When we are inspired to something, for instance creating a new world, we apply projection. Admiration too is related to projection. For instance, when we greatly admire a painter, it may be not because we like what he paints, but because he paints what we like. In our mind we have images of what is beautiful and of what we deem desirable or worth striving after. Every time that we see or experience something that equals this image, we are projecting or mirroring. We recognize what it is and feel in harmony with it, always want to be together with it. Creating is laying down in the material or mental world the images that we admire. The most remarkable creation that we can perform is the creating of new life. At the same time it is a creation with which we have the least room to let our visualization do the job. Creating human life is fixedly tied to biological laws. So for us there is hardly any creating to it. In mythology this seems to be different. There we have numberless examples of persons being engendered in a way that is not customary. The water god Enki from Sumeric mythology creates man from dust. Other myths account of creations from clay. This can also be found in the Popol Vuh. The Sumeric deity Mardoek created humanity from the blood of a deity named Kingoe. Greek mythology has a lot of similar stories. For instance about Pallas Athene, born from the head of Zeus. In American Indian mythology we find examples of beings born from eggs, for instance Pari(a)caca and his brothers, who afterwards did many marvellous things. The birth of Brahma from an egg (Indian Rig Veda) resembles this. The American goddess Orejona also is said to have been born from an egg. Whereas in most mythical stories the concept of creating human life in an unnatural manner, seems to be an interpretation of the strangely appearing of humanlike beings out of strange vehicles, the mystic concept of virgin birth is quite different as to its meaning. In mysticism it is a token of interference from on high, with which cosmic impulses may create a human being in the womb of a woman without her having had intercourse with a man. The basic concept underlying this, is that the mind is capable of creating things by directing laws of nature. They are always working, even when no direction is given to them, but the creative mind can speed up this process. It can either create things quicker or in an unforeseen manner. This is a major thought in mysticism as well as in alchemy. The thesis is, that - with a virgin birth - by directing mental power or by giving a clear field to creative energies, a result may be achieved that otherwise could only have come about by some other process. This other process is not necessarily slower, but it develops along other steps.

Our creative power shapes the world. In many cases this is preceded by the bringing in of our imaginative powers. Where does this imagination come from? It seems to be a quality of our soul personality. It has a manner of perceiving, of self-awareness, of imagining, leading to choices regarding the environment that it wants to be in, and thus it influences its future. Now, do we choose our environment, or are we just attracted towards it? Or, to put it differently, is the inherent urge in any living creature to do something or become something, to create something, in a way brought about by forces beyond its control, and is this creature therefore in complete (relative) harmony with those forces, so in fact 'wished' by them? It seems that the more a creature has a less complex build (like is the case with a cell for instance), it is better open to the cosmic will, and is also more limited in its capability to deviate from this will.

It is conceivable that to human notions like 'weighing information', 'realizing choices' and 'meaningful decisions' we attach such a meaning that we could say that an animal possesses a 'free will'. If an animal would not have that, it would only live shortly. It must be capable to

choose its food, to take an escape route, to find the suited partner, to survive. Therefore it must have a partly reflective consciousness. There are examples of animals that have done something wrong and show guilty behaviour. It is a way of weighing information that leads them to that. One might argue that it are only primitive reactions to an impulse, but this can also be said of our own actions, for also with our education and upbringing it is about conditioning and reacting to impulses. There is no reason to be denigratory about the animal capacities, for they enable each animal to answer to the requirements for survival of its own species. Contrarily we might narrow down the definition of free will to such a level that mankind is considered to be void of free will. For if we act consciously, and sustain that thereby we freely create our future, we accept that 'free' behaviour is no more than nature trying to manifest itself through us. No free will therefore, except when assuming that every free will must of necessity be brought about by our personal nature, that we have been able to freely create this nature in the past, and that, through that, we here and now are the 'weak-willed' (because causal) consequences of this creation. The causes themselves are preceded by the same types of causes over and over again. Free willful actions and thoughts (causes), and unfree realizations (effects), would then alternate, which is exactly at the basis of mystic theory. For when we are acting we set impersonal laws of nature in motion, and if we act in harmony with them, we will be 'free', i.e. in the state of mind in which we realize that we master life and can direct the laws of nature.

We know from experience that not one single human being has a free will at his disposal at all times. Sometimes free will seems possible, often not. So one of the views on free will may be, that it is a function among other functions of man, that interact and influence each other. Already for centuries philosophers discuss such themes as 'free will'. Despite this everybody still creates his own world.

83. Surviving

To be able to maintain itself our human mind must investigate its environment. Knowledge of the environment indicates which measures our organism must take to survive. When we are going to explore something, we need some initial knowledge and interest to start the exploration. Otherwise we would not be cognizant of the subject, and not feel the urge to explore it. At the same time there are subjects unknown to us. These we cannot explore, not because they are forbidden terrain but because we bear no initial knowledge of them yet. These are then outside the scope of our attention, so that no kind of exploration is under discussion. We could never turn this around: first exploring something and then acquiring the initial information about it.

In mysticism new items for investigation are offered to the student through meditation, contemplation and concentration, and through initiation. The exploring of the spiritual field is just as important for our safety and well-being as studying the physical world, where we are on constant alert. Knowledge of the inner realms does offer us protection against wrong influences on the mental field. The decisions that we make, very much depend on the insights that we have and on the ability to inwardly feel what our inner self demands from us. Investigating both the physical and the spiritual world ensures us that we are able to survive in both fields by making the right decisions. At the moment that confusion arises there are two inner impulses: the one to do the one thing, and the other to do something else. What would we do when in a dark forest we arrive at a crossing with one way to one side and another way to the other side, if two persons stand near the crossing one of them warning us not to enter any of those paths, and the other asserting us that nothing is wrong there? If we cannot stay at the crossing indefinitely and must progress, we take one of the paths, but we will proceed with utmost caution, remaining very alert and looking for signs along the way that confirm either vision of the people at the crossing behind us. This way we are advantageous compared with someone who walks the path without any voice having spoken to him at all. For we know, even if our intuition abandons us in the sense that we cannot choose between alternatives, that we must progress cautiously. There are people who, regarding their choice of esoteric school, want to walk both paths at the same time. This is not without danger. I have seen some cases where mystical students got into serious mental problems after having taken up several esoteric studies at the same time. For many it is better to stick to one path, instead of dividing their attention and energy over several paths. The energies involved sometimes do bite.

In order to survive, the mind must be able to control the energies that it is confronted with. Nature shows us in many ways that living beings who have undergone many centuries of evolution, are capable of keeping themselves alive in an effective manner, by making the right choices. To this end these creatures need not have self-confidence. Self-confidence can come in handy, but we all know from experience that fear and instinct are at least as great an impetus to mobilize in ourselves forces which keep us out of danger. With this I have coupled 'surviving' to the notion 'danger'. This seems a bit negative, but if we consider danger as everything that comes from outside ourselves and is capable of directing our lives, our goals, our happiness and our continued existence in a direction that we do not want, then this can very well be linked to 'surviving'. The urge to go our own way, to do everything as we want it ourselves, is related to fighting 'danger' and with 'surviving'. Because of the fact that he has developed a moral attitude modern man will not any longer actually bring into realization everything that he wants. Had he not reached this level in his development, it would mean that he not only wants to survive, there-

fore maintain himself, but also that he would want to live at the cost of others. We deem it immoral to claim more space than is needed to survive. This is a result of the growth of our conscience.

The fight for self-preservation inevitably leads to a certain strength in the organism. Maybe you have noticed that most people who have had to digest a series of misfortunes, are yet capable of picking up the thread of their lives after a while. Regardless the blows that they have received, they draw from a deep source of power. The human mental strength is beyond any imagination. This strength can work two ways. Through the constant pressure that they exercise on their environment, strong characters sometimes get into a position in which their superior strength is no longer questioned. Through that the outward pressure can proceed unbridled. There may come a day that the balance tips to the other side. Then the less powerful rise in revolt and form a counterbalance against the powerful that they do not understand or accept. The resistance at the still prevailing side consequently gets stronger, but so does the counterbalance. These are the conflicts between egos. It are utterances of our wish to maintain ourselves. We are ever sounding out the environment to see where the boundaries of our territories lie. The organism that wants to maintain itself, must find itself in a certain duel with its environment. For the organism does not hover just like that in the vacuum or in the void. In its struggle it always moves in relation to something. It will at all costs try to maintain the integrity of what it is. It will use all incoming forces and influences (information) to that effect. It attracts - possibly through effort of the will - any information that can help it to give shape to that task. The organism that thus acts determines whether the displayed conduct is effective. This is the function of the ego. It wants to react against its environment, and from the contrast that it creates with that environment, it gets profile itself. The ego that too strongly presents itself is seen by the environment as something threatening, as something that wants to find itself outside that environment and for that reason becomes alien and must be expelled. An ego in balance manages to maintain itself by bringing up the required counterpressure against the environment, but that is often all it does. It keeps exerting pressure on the environment, but does not completely extricate itself from it. This renders a situation through which somebody is described as either 'a person glowing with self-confidence', as 'someone with personality', or 'an assertive person'. Whoever in a subtle manner can deal with back pressure, is not specially recognized in his environment, unless by personalities who have a lot of judgment of character at their disposal, and can judge that a fellow human being tries to maintain himself in a careful manner. It can be someone of whom it is said that his or her still waters run deep.

The ego can be seen as an instrument. An instrument with which we maintain our position in the world. The ego will try to maintain whatever it is, at all costs. As long as we are in a state of inertia and are not moved, we are what we are and remain what we are. But this is only a hypothetical situation. Everyone of us is busy developing himself and entering into a relation with his environment. So counterpressure is initiated every moment of the day. Through devoting ourselves to mystic striving a change in the kind of counterpressure that we exercise on our environment will be brought about. Initially we are so shaken by this that our deepest core seems no longer able to maintain its position. If no one tells us about the existence of an 'ego' we are not prepared for this situation. But when the role of the ego is made clear to us, the interaction between ego and environment can be kept in harmony. Regarding the ego there are pitfalls - for which our fullest attention is asked. One of them is that we imagine that our ego has negative aspects only. Also, the ego can undermine someone's life. It is good to be aware of the

risks that we run with the ego. Working on our psychical development may lead to an overstrained ego, but this conflict is part of the process and of the attempt of leading a mystical life, and no aberration of it. If we do not study our ego we have no notion of it existing. When we know it, an attempt can be made to change it. The inertia is stopped; we enter into a 'fray'. If we want to revise or even shut down our ego in the right manner, and this goes for any other part of our being, we should do it with great insight and according to the rules, lest a mental meltdown should take place. In the following Zen story we see what the consequences are of pushing the ego too far. A student was about to demonstrate to his master that he finally had mastered the secrets of life and death. He said to his master: "Look", and he fell to the ground like dead. He could not be made to move and he was like a corpse. There could not be made a distinction between him and a dead body, so everybody declared he was dead. The master did not utter any amazement or approval and waited. After a while the student stood up and asked: "How did I do?" The master answered: "You failed." Changes, brought about in the ego, must be brought about there one at a time, with understanding for our deeper intentions. Then it will not get punched up in such a way that it becomes a burden to us. We need the ego to survive. It may work wonderful things. It is the mainspring of the arts and sciences and of all the great things that have been accomplished by man. I think St Augustin once said: "Do what you want, but do it with love." This is wise counsel to keep in mind when we want to give free rein to our ego.

With discussing survival we have talked about the ego but not yet about resignation. And yet resignation is an important state of mind to be able to survive certain situations. There are moments in life when people run the immediate danger of losing their lives. I have in mind situations of war. There are people who find themselves in the situation that in their lives they have to try to escape death, not one time but countless times. Who come from a line, a time or environment in which fighting a life-and-death battle is such a part of the existence, that it is almost seen as quite a normal condition of functioning. If every moment they have to be on their guard, always have to look behind them, always have to take cover, their lives consist of a continuous tension. In the lives of many people in circumstances of war there are enemies who want to eliminate them. Living face to face with death, living with the unremitting search after the correct tactics to survive, is a wrestling that creates a kind of alertness that within certain limitations leads to an optimum functioning. But it is far from a life in peace profound. It looks as if utter adaptation is a form of numbness. Not in the sense of not being open to (other person's) feelings, but of an apathy required to not become insane. There are many examples known of people who have flourished as a rose in an inclement environment, but also of people who cannot maintain themselves there and isolate themselves from such an environment, or resign. By the way, goodnaturedness, with which we let ourselves be carried along by the stream of life without exerting ourselves noticeably or without appropriating that which is ours according to our 'status', is something different from the lethargy that takes possession of us when we are under pressure in negative circumstances.

Man has adapted himself prolongedly to his environment. Modern society somewhat resembles the jungle in which the wild animals live beside the benign ones, and where the less aggressive animals manage to maintain themselves for centuries already, amidst other, aggressive animals. When we must defend ourselves daily, we get a special attitude. It is the attitude of the front soldier, who at every moment may die a thousand deaths; a kind of resignation that may mean an attack on his entire functioning. On the other hand this resignation may cause a fighting spirit,

the will to get the adverse forces under control and change them. We all have to do with resisting powers that want to dissuade us from the path that we have outlined. We all want to survive in such a way that we think life is worth living. Maybe we can learn something from the animals in the wilderness, through observing them in their natural habitat, where they completely meet the demands that are made upon them by nature and where their minds do not sit in the way. If we could live in such a manner we would just have to add a human achievement to it, namely demonstrating moral insight.

We just looked at the soldier at the front. At the front surviving becomes second nature. There are people who are by nature focussed on resistance. Besides there are people who, forced by the circumstances and always in conflict with them, assume the attitude of a fighting knight and defend themselves by force, in order to survive. At the surface the latter do not differ from those who are aggressive by nature. The aggressive ones are aggressive because that is what they are; the others because they are forced to act like that, for instance out of self-defence. In a human creature, that is aggressive by nature, a fundamental aspect of nature seems to strongly manifest itself, namely that struggle is always present everywhere, varying from a well-meant to an utterly bad fight. In the one who applies force only out of self-defence and self-preservation the same fundamental law of nature manifests itself, namely that every organism will do anything to maintain itself and to stay alive.

If we would not resist impulses that approach us, we would exclusively develop on the basis of mutations not sought or desired by us. We have willpower at our disposal. With it in many cases we can give our life the direction that we deem desirable, and determine part of the present and the future. Through that our evolution takes a direction that otherwise would not have presented itself. Had it presented itself anyway without our effort, it would have been because of our possibly very slowly developing via natural and coincidental mutations and through passive acceptance. The decisions that we make to influence our life and our future give responsibility. This responsibility we must accept. Now, is a creature that has come into existence without any adjusting, the same as if it had developed (quicker) through conscious expressions of the will? Is a creature that has had itself being developed weak-willedly, comparable with a creature that develops wilfully? It has everything to do with responsibility. A human who develops himself and applies his powers, must choose for the white or the black path. He can only walk one of these paths. The choice that he makes determines whether the mastery that he assumes over nature does go beyond his power, especially if he wants to influence others with his willpower.

We are all like sorcerer's apprentices who are left alone in the laboratory by their master for a while. We pick up some retorts and burners, and explore the contents of the drawers and chests. While some students step back, others step forward, and even one or two of them dare to throw some strange looking materials in the burners. Sometimes an explosion follows; most of the time it goes well. But after an explosion the students pick up the pieces, write down in their logs the results of the experiments and in good spirits go on with their work. Our acting, our influencing, and the bringing into service of willpower, create karma. Not in the sense of guilt and fines, or of reward or punishment, but in the sense of a chain of ever new causes and effects within which we shall have to find our way. It is not customary within mystical circles to connect the notion 'guilt' to erroneous deeds, as it is an intellectual qualification applied by man depending on his interpretation of what is happening. But we shall have to make a choice regarding the sphere that we want to join. Otherwise we are a toy of all the powers that want to

take possession of us. The choice for the good, means within a mystical interpretation of the evolutionary doctrine that we, in order to survive, consciously and in a directing manner resist impulses that want to bring us out of balance.

84. The princess

Once upon a time there was a princess who was terribly spoiled. To say that she was a 'minx' is not far removed from the truth. Anyway, she was on her way to become one very quickly. She lived in the palace of her father a long time ago, or in fact not so long ago. In those days a princess had quite a say in matters, especially within the walls of her, excuse me, her father's palace, and our princess had delight in showing her servants and citizens who really was in charge. When the princess was having one of her tantrums and commanded a servant to and fro, the extraordinary phenomenon occurred that both the princess and her servant at that moment in their minds were at some totally different place. The princess gave her orders in an arrogant tone, but meanwhile with a hardly concealed tension thought of her father, who might be listening around the corner. The servant on the other hand who was read a lecture, for the sake of formality winced at her verbal whiplashes, but considered with a suppressed feeling of satisfaction (malicious delight is close to that), that the princess could only rule with her powerful father in the background, and that it was yet to be seen whether she would manage without his support later.

The king, who had observed with concern the ill-mannered behaviour of his daughter for quite a while, decided that the limits of his tolerance had been reached. Should he catch her once in a while, the princess would run out of the palace with her hands on her ears, so that she might hear nothing of the reproaches of her father. Later, when she would have grown up, she would no longer be so frightened. She just had to exercise patience. Yes, later she would have more experience with giving orders and then they would notice who was talking to them. The years went by, our little princess grew up, by no means kinder, but outwardly very much a beauty. Her father, having got on in years, wanted to send the girl, that had remained deaf to his wise admonitions for all those years, on a journey. Although she protested, it was of no good. She had to.

Because her father was still in charge, even if you would expect otherwise, he gave the order that her suitcases be packed and sent her with a minimum of means into foreign parts. She would just have to demonstrate what stuff she was made of. There were enough confidants of the king in the country to check her ways, and to report to his majesty the peregrinations and progress of his daughter. The princess went on her way and even when she had not taken one step outside the walls of her father's palace she groaned and moaned under the carrying of her luggage. Doing so she looked from the corners of her eyes if not a servant would come to her aid to take over the load. This was a false hope, as the king had sent every available hand to other wings of the palace. He knew all too well how the penetrating gaze of his lovely young daughter managed to underline her injunctions. Once having arrived outside the palace moat the princess was convinced that she need not hope of being able to fall back on anyone, and because nobody looked at her anyway, she straightened up and walked on proudly. And if you would not know better, you would swear that she was habituated to nothing else.

After many, many months she arrived at a small cabin, in which an old woman lived that already seemed to expect her. The princess was still so filled with herself that she did not notice this. She almost pushed the old woman aside, put down her cases and took place. Exhaustedly dropping heavily with groans and gasps was a better description, but we will not be too hard on her. Ultimately over the last months she had shown that she possessed a lot more resilience than her

father had dared to expect, let alone she herself. On the road she had had several jobs out of pecuniary trouble and, it must be said, she had been up and doing. Her hands indeed showed a slight development of callous, and in the beginning she had gazed at it as if it were an unknown natural phenomenon. Her eyes looked into the world more mildly and on the way had lost some of their harshness. Sometimes she had encountered tragical situations alien to her in her safe palace surroundings, had become moved and her eyes had become a bit moist. Not really moved of course; that is not done for a princess. But when she really became a bit sad, she furtively looked around her, and if there was nobody to see, she would let her tears run freely.

The old lady took off the cloak from the shoulders of the little princess and arranged it over a large oak chest. And without the old woman having encouraged her, the girl began to narrate. She narrated for hours on end, without pausing. Gestures accompanied her words, tears her apologizing gaze, and frequently she put her hands before her eyes. In her report she went through all her adventures, the pain that she had suffered when her feet were wounded, the fear when she bivouacked in the wood at night alone with all those eerie noises around her whilst she was trying to keep a small fire burning, the doubt about the love of her royal papa, the uncertainty about what all this had to lead to. He who had an eye for it, could see that there was a totally different little princess speaking here than the one who so long ago had left the palace. Milder, wiser and with a burgeoning understanding.

The old woman listened carefully and without the slightest token of becoming impatient. When the girl had finished hours later, the old woman took her hands in hers. "What you should know", she said, "is that you are dreaming. Everything that you have gone through has taken place in an enchanting sleep. It is my privilege to explain to you what the deeper meaning is of what you have gone through. And when I have finished talking, you will rise from your sleep as reborn. The king, he is your inner self: the one and only ruler. Your palace is your own body, in which both you and the king reside. The subjects and servants, to whom you initially thought you gave your orders, are your organs, your limbs, your outer abilities and your cells. You had best leave them alone. Your father has acted very prudently by sending you out of the house, for by doing so he surely has sent you into the Dark Night but at the same time kept you from a most miserable existence. By being left to yourself you have been able to discover that everything that you think you can do, may only take place in harmony and with the consent of your royal father. After all he is the king. And you, you are still a real child of your father ...!"

85. Consciousness

Consciousness, the faculty of thought and self-awareness are terms difficult to comprehend. Each of them contains elements that are difficult to define. The prevailing conviction is, that consciousness is a function and not an entity on its own. But can we divulge the real truth of this difficult phenomenon? What for instance is consciousness as a function? And what is a function? It can be considered the result of the coming together of two or more entities, but what makes this function arise from these entities? What law determines that the uniting of two entities causes the third point to come into being, and that it causes exactly this third point in that capacity? I am inclined to speak of consciousness right from the very first, earliest reactions between the soul principle and the body. Both the faculty of thought and consciousness seem to be the reaction of the coming together of two principles: the material and the spiritual.

Self-awareness in the sense of a consciousness that describes itself is a paradox. What is it that describes itself, and what does it use when doing so? Although in electrical theory it is quite normal to put that the coming together of two different entities yields a third entity (= current), psychology and the materialists among the scientists seem quite at ease with putting that the body without the assistance of a pendant (the soul principle) causes a third factor - i.e. consciousness. Maybe they see the chemical elements in the body as this pendant. However we shall not digress too much. The interaction between the frequency of the body and the frequency of a principle of a higher order (let us call this the soul), manifests itself as a third frequency. It is experienced by us as impressions of awareness, of whatever limited or extended level. The frequency of consciousness in its turn resonates anew with internal and external vibrations and through that shapes new frequencies, new impressions of the mind. Where does consciousness start and where does it end? Consciousness is a mutual reaction of groups of vibrations. We cannot establish a border where the lowest or highest consciousness ends. In other words, we cannot indicate below or above which level of vibrations there is no longer talk of consciousness, self-awareness or the faculty of thought. When a spiritual principle can manifest itself in several kinds of organisms, it depends on the nature of those organisms how the manifesting principle shows itself. We cannot indicate at which point there can no longer be talk of the consciousness, self-awareness or faculty of thought thus becoming visible.

What self-awareness is, and that it is limited necessarily, can be demonstrated with the aid of an analogy. Vibrations group and regroup over and over again. Imagine a sphere in which this takes place. This sphere is a mirror on the inside. Within the spherical shape the manifestations of the vibrations can see each other. And in the sphere they see reflections of themselves. All images have originated from each other. They recognize each other and then speak about self-awareness. By putting this we are obliged to embrace the idea that everything that we perceive, both inside and outside ourselves, is perceived by us as if we see it reflected. Everything perceives itself in other things, as a reflection. So everything belongs to our self-awareness, but some manifestations are nearer to us than other ones, through which their mutual relationship seems to differ greatly. Never shall we perceive everything (at the same time), nor the one that we are ourselves at the moment that we perceive everything else. From moment to moment we can change our perceiving standpoint and become that to which we attune. It also entails that instead of entering one situation after another, we are static and see reality pass in numberless images and impressions of the mind. Life as a whole would then be an illusion, but in a different sense than is put by some oriental philosophies. Let us continue our analogy with the sphere. Although

within the sphere the Self constantly perceives itself and becomes aware of itself, the places of perception change constantly. Consciousness does describe itself, but never wholly. In our mind many patterns manifest themselves daily, evoked by the reflection of ourselves on that which is outside us (the world) or inside us (our inner life). Every situation evokes different kinds of vibrations. Through that, when we are conscious of our Self, we get to know other facets of our personality time and again. The different kinds of vibrations are reflections. When we are conscious we repeatedly come to know new facets of the existing. All knowing is a reflection.

Is a higher consciousness active when our mind works, is it dependent on it for its functioning and is such dependence hierarchical or supportive? It is not that difficult to imagine a consciousness that is elevated above the human, limited one. Many a person assumes, because our intellectual capacity so often fails and has so many shortcomings, and because around us so many principles are active of which we do not understand why they are there and how they work, that there is something beyond us that is more powerful and wiser than us. The consciousness that stands above us is sometimes called the divine principle; in the eyes of some it is an omnipresence that itself has a consciousness at its disposal and can overlook ours. It has then become a personified entity. We feel at ease with the thought that we can yield to the judgment of a higher, spiritual personality. To some this personality is somebody who really exists; to others it is a symbolical image. We make an appeal to a higher, inner consciousness if we want to receive a pure judgment regarding a concept, just as when we know a person whose judgment about it we greatly value, to whom we go for advice. For, when our concept has been completed we like to show to somebody what we have made of it. When he judges it approvingly, we feel strengthened in the assumption that we have done the right thing. Not that we wait for a declaration of consent, but we are certainly grateful for suggestions for improvement or with an encouragement. Then we can reassess our decision and go on with it or reject it. Something similar is the case with invoking a higher consciousness to have it give a judgment. The answer that we then receive is what we call the speaking of our conscience, the intuitive suggestion, and inspiration.

86. The City of God

Some people try to prove the mechanistic world view by pointing out, that when the body or the brains no longer function, consciousness and self-consciousness are gone. But with it it can also be adduced that consciousness can survive and exist without the brains. For when somebody is in a coma and gets out of it, the (self-)awareness returns, this is, after the human incapacity to express it, has been lifted. We can put these views into the following comparison. The mystic puts that there is always consciousness. When it is not visible, it is only because the body obscures it. Neutralize the obfuscation, and the consciousness, which was still there, is visible again. When the body dies, the consciousness is at most no longer visible for a long time, but it is still there. The materialist puts that there is only consciousness when there is a body. When the body is obfuscating consciousness, the consciousness is invisible and absent. Neutralize the obfuscation, and the consciousness is visible. When the body dies, the consciousness is gone forever.

Consciousness is one aspect, but enlightenment is just as important. Let us make it demonstrable, as follows. Suppose we light a candle and then place several coloured glass cases around it. At a given amount of cases the light will have disappeared when looked at horizontally, but not when examined from above. The mechanistically inclined person will have to admit that the independent existence of the light does not depend on the cases, because when these are lifted the light will reappear and it has been there all the time. The mystic will assert that the light remains existing even when there are material obstacles for its shining. It must be admitted that this comparison is false, for the following reason. Neither the mystic nor the materialist can prove that his concept regarding consciousness is true. In the comparison with the candle the candle was constantly present and burning, which means that the comparison can only illustrate the concept of the mystic. Had the materialist wanted to deploy the comparison with the candle, he would have made sure that with the placing of every glass the candle would have started to burn less, for instance through the cutting off of the oxygen more and more. When removing the cases he might have rekindled the candle and increased the supply of oxygen. When he looks at the human personality, the person with the mechanistic view puts that the light for its existence and for expressing itself, needs the body (the material case). The mystic considers a material case at most to be an obstacle for the light to express itself.

The comparison with the light and the cases can however be used to say something about enlightenment. There are many levels of it. Suppose we have a big, strong light. We put this light in a huge city. We can call it the City of God. Then we make glass walls, that we will put around the light later. We give them different colours. Some walls we make from transparent glass, other ones from glass that cannot or can hardly be looked through. We make the walls in different sizes, so that each time the one is some meters wider in diameter than the other. Finally we make holes in some of the walls. Some big, some small, at several locations in the walls. Now we begin placing the smallest glass wall over the bright light, that is so dazzling that we can hardly look in it. After having done this, we place all the consecutive walls over the previous one. After a long time we decide that the work has been completed. At that instant we find ourselves on the periphery of the city.

Now we invite a couple of people to accompany us to the outside wall. There they are blind-

folded, picked up as by a miraculous wind and each one is placed somewhere in the city between one of the numberless walls, where their blindfolds are removed. Some of the people are still near the outer rings of glass, others somewhere in between, and a few are between the smallest glass walls near the centre. Each of these people may walk around freely between the two walls where he has been placed. Some people, walking about, look in the direction of the outside walls. There may be hundreds of walls between them and the city boundary. Other people stand with their face in the direction of the centre of the city. Two people placed in the same ring, looking in the same outside direction, will see different things. The one for instance looks at the red wall in front of them and by coincidence can see through three holes which lie at the same level in three more outwardly lying walls, enabling him to see the fourth wall that lies in the direction of the most outer wall. He may find this fourth wall to be a similar red wall, but he might also discover that the fourth wall is green. Now the other person, standing a few meters next to the earlier mentioned person and just like him standing with his back to the centre of the city, may see nothing but the red wall near to him. This because at the spot where he stands there are no holes in the wall.

When both persons turn around, looking into the direction of the centre, they may again see things that differ from each other. The one person may see directly through holes in the walls into the light: he is enlightened. The other person might come across another kind of view, depending on whether there are holes at his spot near the wall, and - when these are there - depending on the kind, colour and transparency of the glass walls between him and the bright light. We took it that these two people stand between the same walls. But through the city several people are standing, looking in any direction, between different walls, with their respective views. No matter where they stand, there are conditions that enable them to see the light or withhold it from them. But if they would walk about and look through different holes, or perhaps would shift from one layer of glass to the other, they might change their perspective on reality, on life.

Although we may be standing next to a person that we know, we never fully understand what spot of the wall he is looking at. We may think that we both look in the same direction and perhaps we do, but our view through the holes that are in the walls may either give us a view in concordance with our neighbour's, or give a completely different outlook. Dependent on the colours of the walls and the number of holes in them, it may even be that when we turn around and look into the direction of the outside walls, we see things more brightly than when we turn into the direction of the centre. But for the same reason the light in the centre might be much closer to us than we would expect. Who knows we might try to make a journey into the direction of the outside wall, in the assumption that the light awaits us there. But there is only one way that leads to the light, and for that we must travel in the direction of that light. Even if we should have to pass dark walls from time to time. Some people, looking at the wrong spot from the wrong place, may see us going a way that in their opinion is right towards the dark. Perhaps they judge us for that. But only we ourselves will know if that which seems dark to others, is for us the right path to the light.

87. The usefulness of secrecy

There are secrets in mysticism, for sure, but revealing them is of no use to somebody who is not directly involved with it. Even if we explain to someone how swimming is done he can only do it when he goes through the lessons and tribulations that an experienced swimmer has gone through. None of the real secrets of mysticism can be revealed just by reading mystical texts or by listening to someone. Somebody must act upon what he reads or hears. This goes for outsiders but also for insiders. Nobody will learn to swim just by reading about it. The revealing of secrets on the mystical plane is often of no benefit. This is not to say that everything of the mystic field should remain concealed. It is all right to tell other people about the existence of our esoteric school and what it stands for. But just because we ourselves are carefully introduced by our school into a new world of thinking, we should give ourselves time to ripen, and initially be hesitant to speak to others about our accomplishments and the contents of our study. Not because our work and progress are to be kept secret, but because our mental and physical system need a bit of time to get used to a new way of thinking. Mystical tuition has to accomplish a gradual awakening of all our faculties. So there is every reason to be hesitant when talking to others, also regarding the methods of awakening the inner self. We can explain to somebody some of these principles if we have decided for ourselves that this is useful to him. We can weigh the mindset of the other person against the need to protect the interests of both our esoteric school and ourselves.

There also is a psychological aspect to secrecy. To things that are kept hidden we are drawn out of curiosity, because it seems to be part of human nature. This characteristic may keep us going over a great number of years and stimulate us to develop ourselves. The initiations of the esoteric schools are signposts in this quest. Some stages of our study are only revealed when we are up to it. Some of the veils are lifted for instance during an initiation, because we have earned it by our constantly attempting to grow and learn. Secrecy is an intrinsic part of our mystical journey. As initiation candidates of our esoteric school we are involved with this secrecy. But even if our esoteric school would make an attempt to initiate us in everything, would try to reveal every secret, even then the main part of mystical knowledge would have to originate from ourselves. Our inner Master is the genuine guide and initiator in our lives. Despite anything that might be written or said about this to the contrary, the inner Master is at the basis of what we should accept as knowledge. When a human being is an initiator to us, his role will be minor of necessity. The first reason for this is, that a human initiator cannot exactly know what we need and whom we are. Secondly, an initiation candidate can only be sure to understand the initiator if he finds himself in the theoretical situation that he can rightly interpret his utterances, as there are a saying, an exhortation or an explanation. Thirdly, and this is easily overlooked, the same goes for the initiator towards the initiation candidate. They would have to have the fullest knowledge regarding each other's meanings, the hidden subtleties and multiple secret layers in it (meant for initiates on different levels of development), each other's cultural background et cetera. As soon however as a mental image leaves the mind of the initiator in the shape of a saying or a nonverbal expression like a gesture, the initiation candidate cannot be absolutely sure that it is exactly coming to him as intended by the initiator who sent it, materialized it. Let alone that he could establish whether such an image has the assent of the inner Master of that initiator. Therefore being silent is important, a last resort in case of doubt, so that we can listen to the voice of our own inner self and attribute the highest value to it.

When the student takes the tuition of his school for a written course in mysticism, he will gain only on the intellectual level. Then he will gain no secret, no secret will he reveal. Then not one single secret will be lost and no sacred grounds be trodden. The biggest secret lies in the fact that the mystical students who have found the secrets in themselves, are united and know each other. They will know each other when they meet. Initiated personalities are bound by invisible ties, which one gains by exertion.

88. Fifteen phases

There are many fraternities and philosophies which take their departure from the idea that illumination is achieved through a number of phases. Sometimes these are chronological, in other cases they are just to be followed in any order. The mere fact that some of these highly spiritual organizations mention different numbers of phases whereas also the contents of the phases differ, is an indication that it is not so important which number we establish. If we would set ourselves the task to picture our mystical path as consisting of, say, seventeen or perhaps twenty-two phases, we would no doubt be able to do so. It may be a help to the student to strive after the realization of some numbers of phases, because this way he focusses his attention to his personal mystical 'agenda'.

It is rather a good assumption that if our foundation is well made, the upper structure will be stable too. But it need not be that when we have started with a wrong foundation, we will never be able to erect a sound building on it. If for instance somewhere at the beginning of our mystical study we should fail to accept some universal principle or doctrine, would this make it impossible or difficult for us to continue with our study and our mystical path, and to make progress? To say something about that we must first know what 'the mystical path' is. What is 'making progress', what is a 'universal principle'? If mystical development would be a one-way road, with which each step taken would only lead to one specific point further on the path, then it would seem logical that indeed when missing some step on this path or taking a different step than prescribed, we would deviate from 'the' path. The mystical view does not take it so literally, which will be a comfort for us in our study once we can see how true this is. Mystical development is not a one-way thing. Somebody once said that there is no path. With every step we take, in any direction, the path is coming into being at that instant. Whichever decisions we make, they will take us somewhere.

The mystical path, if there is one, consists of trying to develop a feeling for the subtle urges of the Inner Self. This can be done by meditation, contemplation and concentration. The techniques for this are given by the esoteric school. The school also develops a moral basis within the heart of the student. Gradually we learn to recognize the little voice inside. Many esoteric schools painstakingly try to convey the view that definitions of for instance 'God' are limited through the limitations of the human reasoning capacity. Somewhere, when trying to fathom the things that underlie all other things, we will find that words are no longer able to contain our insights and what we feel. Thus we may come to a notion like 'the God of our heart', or 'the God of our comprehension'. If we have a personified image of God, we should not feel compelled to leave this view. The fact alone that we try to picture what a creator is, is a token of our longing for contact with things of a high or highest nature. The direction in which we search for better understanding of these things is determined by ourselves.

So, on the one hand there is the esoteric school, teaching the universal principles of how to live in harmony with one's inner self and with the universe. On the other hand there is the student, trying to develop a sensitivity for what he himself considers to be worthy of being in contact with. Somewhere these two aims will find each other perfectly. In other words, we should just lead the life that we find just, try to maintain our attunement to the highest things that we can imagine, and investigate critically and with an open mind the points of view that our esoteric school has to offer. We are not obliged to accept anything that can be found in

the study of its doctrines. We are stimulated to investigate and to keep that which we have found to be true and useful for our inner development. When we take this into consideration, we will see that many views can converge without conflicting with each other.

Our development cannot be subdivided into a fixed number of phases. Our path is difficult to predict. Let us not embrace dogmas, not even in the field of the number of phases. There are so many points to give attention to, so many differing characters among the students, so many cultures from which they stem, that only in a way a universal system for all these differing students can be established. Some philosophies nonetheless divide their path into certain phases, which are said to go for all students. Through that it seems as if the development of a student in mysticism always has to go along the lines of preset phases, or at least should allow to be ranged among them. A division is useful as far as it is a means to delineate a line in the mystical work. You might just compare a number of such step by step divisions described by the several schools. You will see that in them overlaps can be found, and that for our personal syllabus we shall be able to use elements from both the one and the other school. Besides the fact that the path can be divided into phases of a character shaping nature, it is also possible to make a range of the supplementary developments. The now following division into the randomly chosen number of fifteen phases can be seen as something to go by. It is one of the many ways to establish how the separate parts of the path look like and that the number of phases does not matter.

The first phase is being open to new things. Everything around the student can serve him for learning. When he connects his mental attitude with this, he has the susceptibility that is necessary for being able to critically absorb a new thought.

The second phase. The student learns that everything that he accepts as true, is the result of impressions from within and from the outside. Education and schooling - in short, conditioning - and biological factors, make him the one he is.

The third phase. He must look for a method to dispose of his limitations. The will to do so is not enough. Action is needed and a plan of action. He must draw from sources where the things that he is looking for are already present.

The fourth phase. He discovers what powers he has at his disposal.

The fifth phase. He learns to handle the discovered powers carefully.

The sixth phase is meeting the barrier between himself and everything that is cosmic, expressed in the term 'the confrontation with the Guardian on the Threshold'.

The seventh phase. There arises a fight between himself and the Guardian, which fight is being settled through an amalgamation of the two. The silencing of the thoughts is a method to do this.

The eighth phase concerns the looking for the places where the student finds an optimum attunement to the cosmic: the sanctum, nature, in brief a place that through its effluvium is so strong that it can serve the pupil as a workplace.

The ninth phase is the insight, that eventually only being-without-being brings enlightenment. Then there will be an increase of the control over life because the student, living as someone who has expired, this is, actually living from the cosmic sphere, also masters the lower laying sphere.

At the tenth phase he learns to melt together with the powers that he masters, as did the Egyptian priests, who said that they assumed the shape of the gods. The priests became one with the powers they used.

At the eleventh phase the student will find that it is not important to know whether something works, but how it works and can be used.

The twelfth phase marks the arising of the insight that the use of powers is connected with an outer exertion of power, and that later the will works from within and brings about everything almost automatically.

In the thirteenth phase the student takes into consideration what it is to be a student. What is he in essence?

As the fourteenth phase we mention the increasing ability of the student to be unpredictable. Being capable of doing what one has to do, without taking probabilism into consideration, is a hallmark of mastership.

In the fifteenth and final phase the student will learn in a practical manner that he should not lose contact with earthly life.

You will doubtlessly recognize these patterns or learn to know them. We shall take a closer look at them.

First phase

The first phase is that the student is open to learning. Useful knowledge that he has gained he keeps, other knowledge he drops, depending on the way how he judges it. When we feel the urge to preserve what we have learned, we must give in to that. The judgment regarding the use of gained knowledge must come from ourselves. Mysticism does not teach us not to do things. We must make assessments ourselves, if need be by doing everything the wrong way. There are hardly any courses where one does not start at the very beginning. Take the student in the fine arts. If he wants to go to the academy of art he will have to show maps or demonstrations of his former work, or otherwise give proof of the level that he has reached. He may have reached this level without or with the help of others. If his present level is sufficient, he may study at the academy and is taught the basic principles of his art: the way history has envisaged his art, the working with the artist's paraphernalia, and composition theory. So there are many elements which combined form the study. Even when the entire knowledge of the mystical science seems fragmented it is in fact not. Every lesson is like a piece of a hologram. It shows everything in detail if we look at it from the right angle.

When having started with the mystical work of an esoteric school we may have encountered a paradox, which is, that we are asked to temporarily forget everything that we have learned of mysticism, even of philosophy in general. At the same time we are asked to believe nothing, and only to accept something as true if we have found it to be true. The paradox is, that in order to achieve this we have to follow the guidelines of the esoteric school. So, to unlearn a doctrine we have to adapt one. It is a Master's way of how to approach a beginning pupil. But this starting point is only temporary, for eventually we will be able to judge the study for ourselves and also be able to judge the esoteric school.

There is no shortcut to enlightenment or growth. We cannot plant a seed and when the first leaves of the plant show above ground level grasp them, pull them up and shout to them that they have to grow immediately. It is a very delicate process and it takes time. So, there is no shortcut, but many students do have a considerable stock-in-trade of their own when they begin with their study. They have the feeling that they know much more than the esoteric school teaches them in the beginning. It is a well-known phenomenon within the esoteric schools and is recognized as such. The tuition will often get back to this awareness. Somewhere deep inside us we may already know certain things, through the inner voice that - when listened to - gives us remembrances of timeless wisdom and knowledge. Therefore we will no doubt develop our own pace with the study, which is good, for we are the only ones to set this pace.

So, knowledge comes from a teacher and also from within ourselves, and sometimes through someone whom we do not hold to be a teacher. To investigate everything and keep that which is good (no matter where it comes from), is a hallmark of good apprenticeship. We may meet an unlettered or unlearned person who puts us on the right track and from whose remarks we are capable of learning a lesson. Because we often do not steer this kind of encounters, we are reluctantly brought into contact with truths that may come from the mouth of people whom we think are not acceptable. The important lesson is, that we can gain insight through a king or a beggar, through someone of standing or through an insignificant person. It requires an objective mind reasonably detached from the ego, to discover that the only thing that really matters is that each lesson is learned that can be learned. We react to certain statements or forms of behaviour, and through reflection determine what their meaning is to us. This is how we learn how we can be open and unprejudiced towards new tuition. The fear to let things run by people who are not on our level, initially makes us carefully weigh the messenger of new knowledge. But when we are on to the fact that it is us who determine whether something in our surroundings may contain a lesson for us, we no longer need to fend off the 'wrong' messengers forcedly. Via all sorts of teachers we are shaped. Our purpose is, to become a human being with knowledge. What should be understood by this, will be apparent further on.

Second phase

The second phase is the awareness that everything that we know is the result of schooling from the inside or from the outside. The knowledge that we receive from the outside, is added to during our lives very intensively. What we perceive is the reflection of our selves. The way of the mystic is, that he discovers what is present inside and outside him. Through intellectual knowledge we have weakened the voice of our inner self. It is still there but often is not heard

well. Thus the purpose of mystical schooling is to learn that when we enhance our awareness we will be able again to see and hear our inner self.

Third phase

The third phase is seeking a method to do so, and the systematic application of this method. There are many methods. Even when we cannot find them it is still possible to gain insight. When we have difficulty with listening to our inner self, a firm shock may be necessary to wake us up. This shock may consist of a lesson that somebody else imparts to us unwittingly, for instance when in a subtle manner he has trapped us by means of suggestion. In the final analysis we determine what is becoming of us. When we are blinded we step in our own pitfalls. When we are not blinded nobody can play tricks on us. In mysticism we find subtle signposts to walk the way safely. These we must seek and find ourselves.

Fourth phase

The fourth phase is the discovery of the forces that exist in nature. Mystical education time and again draws our attention to the forces of nature, especially those that are not in the schoolbooks but all the same do constitute part of the cosmos, and the mastering of which must be conquered. During our mystical schooling it will become clear what spiritual laws there are, and gradually they will be fathomed. Next to the inner laws there are the phenomena which are the result of those laws. Clairvoyance, attunement and the ability of perceiving auras, are examples of this. Sometimes we learn these things in a natural manner. For instance everybody knows what 'atmosphere' is, but will not always express this in wordings like 'aura' or 'vibrations'. When we observe other people and really analyse what we see, we can sometimes unerringly indicate what is the matter with them, even if they do not give themselves away by nonverbal means. This is when we gauge their auras and interpret our impressions of them.

Fifth phase

The fifth phase is the learning how to deal with the forces that we have discovered. We must learn to sense them in ourselves and use them. The alchemists warned against an unprepared quest in the realm of the psychical powers. Most mystical schools warn against an irregular investigating of the secrets of nature. Look at the child that is left to itself in a laboratory. Sooner or later it will cause an explosion through ignorance. Only by being prepared we can enter a terra incognita without danger. To illustrate this I shall show you a poem from the old Rosicrucian writing of the 17th century called 'die Alchimische Hochzeit von Christian Rosencreuz', or 'the Alchemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreuz'.

Dies ist der Tag, dies ist der Tag
für den, der zur Königshochzeit kommen mag.
Bist du dazu geboren,
von Gott zu Freud' erkoren,
magst auf den Berg Du gehen,

auf dem drei Tempel stehen,
und dort das Wunder sehen.

Sei wachsam,
erforsch Dich selbst bedachtsam.
Wirst Du nicht in Reinheit dich baden,
wird sicher die Hochzeit Dir schaden.
Wer sich nicht wäscht von Sünden,
den wird man zu leicht befinden.

- - -

This is the day, this is the day
for him who is allowed to be at the king's wedding.
Are you born for it,
joyfully elected for it by God,
then you may climb the mountain,
on which stand three temples,
and there behold the miracle.

Be vigilant,
carefully investigate yourself.
If you do not bath in purity,
the wedding will surely damage you.
He who does not wash away his sins,
will be weighed and found wanting.

(translation by the author)

Sixth phase

As the sixth phase there is the conquering of the barrier that divides us from everything that is considered part of the Great Light. We ourselves constitute the barriers and this is often called the confrontation with the Guardian on the Threshold. Our karma, our previous incarnations, our education and schooling, all this can be an impediment (or a help) to discover the Great Light. On the one side we ourselves stand, with all our experiences and our intellectual and emotional qualities; on the other side, or rather in ourselves, is the Light. Both are separated by obstructions. How do we bridge these opposites? The handling of a personal barrier leads to a temporary dislocation. It is just as if we remove the girders from a house without already having some replacement at hand. This gives uncertainty and some degree of fear. Fear is a form of self-preservation. It is also an obstruction to explore a new area. If we can get rid of this fear, without losing the alertness necessary for our self-preservation, there are no longer unwelcome surprises that bring us out of balance. The secret is that everything transforms if only we can and want to transform ourselves.

Seventh phase

The seventh phase. The confrontation with the unknown produces fear. We cannot fully understand our own inner being, and this can cause fear also. As said it is called the Guardian on the Threshold, who in fact is our mere protector, our own conscience, and our contact with what wants to keep us alive; the one that we think we do not know, but whom we know very well, because he consists of us. In the Tibetan Book of the Dead it is depicted, that the deceased human being is confronted in the hereafter with all sorts of monstrous and frightening images, which however all have to be recognized by him as projections of his own personality. There is no need for fear, perhaps for caution. We must look the Guardian directly in the eye. Thus we find peace past the opposites. It can be compared with perceiving an unknown object in the distance, coming towards us. As long as it is very remote and cannot be distinguished by us for what it exactly is, we feel neutral. As it comes nearer and appears to have a frightening appearance we begin to become restless. If the object is indeed frightening and can be observed in its full entirety, our worry increases. There comes a moment that the strange phenomenon has approached us so closely that we are standing right in front of it. It then cannot come closer to us. With that the confrontation has come to an absolute end and sometimes also the fear. Fear seems to be a means for our personality to maintain itself. But, once the mind realizes that the danger is over, it must lay its instrument (fear) aside. It is as with a medicine that we use for treating some ailment. After the ailment has gone the medicine must be abandoned, for there is no sense in adding medicine to an organism that is already in equilibrium again. Thus we have also covered the seventh phase, which is the fight between us and the Guardian on the Threshold. It is not a battle between good and evil. It is more about opposites in a general sense, about polarities.

Eighth phase

The eighth phase is the notion that we live in two worlds at the same time. We move in a material vehicle through which energies flow. Our glands process these energies. The body is connected with the higher nature through certain points, and the world itself also has these connecting points. Certain spots on the earth possess a strong concentration of energy. Such spots can be recognized by those who are attuned to them. A powerspot (to use a term of Don Juan, from the books of Carlos Castaneda) can charge us, bring us inspiration and harmonize with us. Disharmonic powerspots should be avoided by us. Every place by the way can be charged by us into a personal powerspot. This may be understood to be a place that through our prolonged presence records our characteristic radiation and, for whom is sensitive to it, manifests it. This also goes for building a personal place for meditation.

If we stay too long on any spot in our lives or remain in a situation too long, it sooner or later comes to a farewell. Should we postpone a farewell too long, a tension will build up in our aura that comes to an outburst. Therefore a place or situation that we have literally exhausted for our development, is dangerous. We all know examples of this from the film industry. There are scenarios in which a man or a woman who has led an active or even fashionable life has been left behind alone in the house in which this life took place. Such a house can be a normal home, but castles do occur also. The leading figure is under the spell of a time long since gone, is a prisoner of that time. The whole house bears the traces of a past to which the occupant cannot

say farewell. It does become a haunted house occupied by man. You may also know the films in which a closed room in a big house harbours old secrets, for instance a room that has been prepared for nuptial dinner. The groom has lost his life on the day of the wedding or has gone away. The remaining wife forbade that the room be changed. When after years the door is opened by others, the whole table appears to be still set with victuals, and spider's webs fill the entire room. This kind of images is familiar and archetypal to us, because we unwittingly sense what is going on here. The left behind wife is so shocked by what happened immediately prior to her marriage, that in her mind she wants to revive and relive the already past situation over and over again. There is a discrepancy between the tangible reality and the reality that she tries to reanimate. The past that she tries to hold on to is energetically dead. Instead of creating a future the person involved tries to revive the past, which is not possible. This attempt can cause great damage to the human mind, and consequently in this kind of films the leading figures are insane.

Another image is the wandering lord or lady of the manor in an already decayed castle. Through an unfortunate concurrence of circumstances he or she has been left behind alone. In the corridors of the castle there is still the reverberation of the exuberant feasts that have once been held there. We recognize that this kind of situations is always accompanied by an extremely sinister atmosphere. It is not caused by the fact that the old situation has passed and has been replaced by a new one. It is caused by the occupant, who has not been able to break away from the past and nonetheless has gone into the new era. Through that he has become torn up. He calls up old memories time and again and tests them against the newest impressions. Through this such a gulf in time occurs that both impressions fight an energetic battle with each other.

Let us not forget that though such films are considered by us to be a world of fantasy, there is a kind of universally living recognition of the special auric condition that has been put into the scenario by the filmmaker. It is not just fantasy. The filmmaker is aware of the effect of certain everyday situations on the human mind, and this knowledge he assimilates in the scenario. The script has been set up with the intention to create a mysterious, ghostly atmosphere that we all recognize as the expression of a wrongly functioning human mind.

Nineth phase

In the ninth phase man when he lives like a deceased, also masters the realm of the living. The state of the deceased is symbolically that of complete surrender to everything that is nonmaterial and intangible. The student who has left everything behind and abandoned everything, even if 'only' in the mind, no longer suffers losses. The lacking of an impulse to acquire material things, gives inner peace. The ego no longer finds a need to defend itself or to resist. It no longer loses any energy with trying to keep things that someone else tries to take away from it, nor does it lose energy with the pursuing of certain purposes. But let us not forget that it remains necessary to distinguish the idealistic from the realistic. It is not required from us to actually leave hearth and home to be detached. Neglecting our possessions and that which surrounds us is not a token of real enlightenment. The completely abandoning of all earthly things can even be a sign of being attached: attachment to the wish to lead a wholly immaterial and spiritual life. There must be no pressure whatsoever to follow whichever path. The deep rest in which we do not care whether we are rich or poor, is not to be gained. It must fall to us as a cloak put around our shoulders and cannot be forced.

Tenth phase

As the tenth phase there is the amalgamating of man with the forces that surround him. There is a Zen anecdote to illustrate this. A pupil has stayed in a monastery for years and has been thoroughly trained there in the martial arts. At the moment that he is about to leave the monastery, he asks his master: "With my knowledge shall I be able to kill my enemy when I am attacked?" The answer of the master is: "If you have really digested our training you will not even get into the situation in which you will need it." At that moment the student, just like the Egyptian priest in antiquity, learns to become one with the forces that he wants to master, and to create his own fate. The powers themselves are outside the visible world and are beyond any attack. When man masters the forces, he has assumed the shape of the powerful gods.

Eleventh phase

The eleventh phase is the insight that it is not important whether something works, but how it works and can be used. One of the first things that a mystical student learns, is letting his intuition work. The laws that lie at its basis come much later in the study. First of all it is about the practical side of the work. Our abilities can be applied without us possessing too much intellectual knowledge of them. The establishing by experiment whether a theory works, is the best way of acquiring knowledge. Intuition can put us on the track of things that are worth exploring.

Twelfth phase

The twelfth phase is the insight that moving the forces of nature requires an effort in the beginning, whereas later it seems to go automatically. This is very important and of an alchemical nature. Inside the being of the pupil there is a cooking going on, a purifying, distilling over and over, until at a certain moment there is no longer a difference between the striving after being something, and this something. Mysticism distinguishes between the methods of concentrating and meditating, which are both necessary to be able to create something. This is why they can be distinguished, but not separated, and they must be so intertwined that we master our lives without outer exertion, purely on the basis of our inner will. This requires exercise. It is like learning how to write. First it is difficult and we have to think with what we do. Then everything goes naturally, for something inside us orders us to take care of the carrying out of our wishes. Being open to inner instructions, in order that they finally be executed automatically, is one of the pillars that mystical tuition rests on.

From the point where we are to the point where we want to be, is a road. This road can be difficult, but can also be made more easy. When we want to study we hope to be able to go at it relaxed. We shall also need other circumstances to be able to do the study, like decent housing, enough money to study, pleasant fellow-students. Some of these circumstances are present, others are not. Some we can direct, others not. When we progress we will see that between our starting point and the point where we get, nature will have filled all the tiny gaps with events that

allow us to walk this path of study. This means that we may concentrate on a goal, and yet can never fully comprehend or foresee along which way everything takes its shape.

Thirteenth phase

In the thirteenth phase the pupil wonders who he is. What is the being that works on its development? A mystical student is somebody who aims at making use of the possibilities of life as completely as possible. He does this through a conscious and sound use of his knowledge of the esoteric tradition and of the powers that he possesses as a human being. With this, good will and striving are at least as important as actually achieving a purpose.

Fourteenth phase

The fourteenth phase is the ability to be unpredictable. In that situation we seem to circumvent the patterns. In reality this is more subtle. Through our knowledge of the patterns we can give our existence a complexion as if it no longer obeyed laws. At the most we then show the unknown results of a law that is still functioning in all respects. He who is freed from the treadmill of life is capable of directing the events himself. Everyone can try to grow beyond opposites, but the switchover can only be accomplished if we have fully concentrated on what we want. Our inner self is the steady factor, but although we might expect that precisely this makes us predictable, it can take us off the blueprint of normal life, after which we manifest our own plan.

Fifteenth phase

The fifteenth phase is the balanced application of the inner power. Having arrived at a given point, it is enticing to lose contact with earthly reality and to prefer a continued stay at the spiritual level to an attempt to make something more balanced from the earthly existence. I am convinced that when soothing a child that has hurt itself, we are as near to the heavenly realms as when we are in our sanctum meditating. These things can be in perfect harmony. He who has his head in the clouds all day, loses contact with his fellow human beings and ignores the part that the physical environment plays in his organism. Mental health is a delicate state of consciousness that can easily be lost with a personality structure that is quickly exalted and then loses itself in higher things. A mystical school that is truly bent on the well-being of its students will therefore always caution for this pitfall as follows: live in two worlds if you want, but keep both in balance and harmony and be yourself always and everywhere.

The circumstances may be thus that the initiate sometimes longs for a farewell from this world; a world that is in so many respects void of mystical enlightenment. It is sometimes hard to notice that the flame burning in us can not always ignite the hearts of those around us. But at the same time we should realize that if the highest principles of the universe can be expressed and manifested through the human consciousness, it is the earthly world where we must be active.

89. The school

What ethical basis could schools give to their children? Only few things are so important for the child growing up as the schools that it visits. After his senses, mind and emotions have been reasonably trained at home, the big moment comes that he goes to school. A place that he will look back upon later with great gratitude and satisfaction, or a place of grief and loneliness. Let us for a moment reflect on the nature of these institutes.

An unprepared personality can be totally taken by surprise through the buildings, the size, the name and the aura of his school. This can be an uplifting experience, or a depressing one. A convent school offers tranquility because of its still, mystical nature. It can be an oasis where the growing up child may develop. However, few it is granted to undergo tuition in such an environment. In many countries schools compete. Through their presentation they hope to build a reputation that will attract the best students and will drag in the highest subsidies. But is it that important that a school exclusively aims at turning out the intellectually most promising child? Ought not a school try to get the maximum out of every child, tap the finest sources in the child?

All the educational establishments should take into account that every student can rise to great heights and can be an asset to his school and the world, provided that this is understood to be in the spiritual and social sense. True greatness does not lie in the high marks, the intellectual achievements and the high posts reached by the pupils. Real greatness means that the child is capable of living in harmony with its environment and its inner self, and from there of fulfilling the tasks that will come to it naturally. A perceptive school can inspire its students to achievements founded in their deep, inner and spiritual self.

There are schools where the student is confronted every day with the great achievements of his institution. Probably the somewhat timorous personalities are daily frightened off by the magnified school image that they must manage to make their own. What a burden, if not a torment, must it be for the hesitant, modest student when every day his school rubs it in that he and his fellow students are the best of their country, the most promising, or whatever. Then the inner self must compete with egos, with reflections of true greatness, and seems to be disqualified in advance. Every school should pattern itself on the esoteric schools from antiquity, and write over the gate the term 'Know Thy Self'. Every student should be able to enter his school in the knowledge that it is a House of Development, instead of a House of Knowledge.

90. Animals and meditation

Someone asked whether it would be detrimental for him if he meditated in the presence of animals. This question possibly comes from the thought that animals represent a lower form of life, and that they influence us negatively when we are occupied with work of a lofty nature. This is an interesting view, because it starts from the assumption that animals represent a demonstrably lower form of life than man, and that the more man is occupied with loftier work, the more he is vulnerable for attacks on his person. The idea of the lower and higher forms of life, of the phased creation, is very old. We see an example of it in the work of the Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, who introduced the thought of the hierarchical realms of the angels. Many mystics and theologians also, have felt attracted towards the idea that nature is built in layers, each of which expressing a distinction with regard to the other as to the level of development. Minerals, plants, animals, human beings and realms of angels, is the well-known range that they keep in mind with that. Every group in the hierarchy has its own role. None of the groups has need of thwarting the other ones. Each of the groups can within its own hierarchical structure do 'good' or 'bad' things, which need not necessarily have to ensue from conscious choices, and at best indicate that one functions within the band width of one's group. Man is intensively involved with the mineral, plant and animal kingdom. These realms in many cases form a threat to each other and on the other hand need each other. The pet animals for instance who are kept by man, often enjoy humans as much as the other way around. But sometimes humans and animals are injurious towards each other. And minerals are necessary for the human body, but are sometimes injurious also. Finally, let us understand, that the hierarchical structure is a product of the human mind, that also gave this structure a qualitative aspect that need not be there in a cosmic sense.

Back to the question. When the company of a pet is comfortable to us when we do not meditate, by which factors then could the presence of the animal be detrimental during meditation? To answer this question we must look at two things. At the kind of influence that the animal is supposed to disseminate, and at the change that somebody undergoes when he meditates. When we meditate we are in a different state of mind than normally. We have switched off our outer senses as much as possible and want to be receptive to impressions of our inner self. Can this make us more vulnerable to influences that originate from our passive pet? That we temporarily rule out our senses does not mean that we are unresistingly at the mercy of the influences around us, whether these stem from an animal or from a human being. This is to say, we run neither more nor less risks than someone who falls asleep in the vicinity of a pet or another human being. A risk might be that in such a state of mind we are attacked unexpectedly. But we also run such a risk when we are wide awake.

We might wonder if the lowered state of consciousness of somebody who is meditating can have a magnetic working on animal energies that disseminate from an animal, whatever those may be. With that we arrive at the question whether differing hierarchies can exchange energy in a negative manner. As it looks, minerals, plants, animals and humans can in general very well hold out in each others vicinity. Suppose we should have to remove any living creature from the room before we could start meditating. If we would remove our cats, dogs and plants, we would also have to remove flies or the microscopic little creatures in our carpet. When they are quiet they will not disturb our work. We are personalities with inner energy. The mystical student learns how to provide himself with strength and to be in harmony with the world. Why would an

animal be negative? Even when we are gathered with people we are quite capable of meditating, no matter how negative some persons in the group may be. I think that if we apply a meditation technique well, we will not be influenced by the energy of the other persons around, nor by the energy of animals.

91. Brotherhood

What does brotherhood encompass? And especially the brotherhood within a mystical organization? A mystical pupil first of all goes to work to become a different person. He wants to walk the mystical path to arrive at his goal. The working together with other pupils can quicken this road, but for some it is better to study on their own. Whoever affiliates with a fraternity will find many opportunities there to work on his personality. As it involves working together with other students, there are many factors with this way of development that we do not find with studying on one's own. For the student is involved with all kinds of activities and processes that have no direct bearing on mystical schooling. The being together with other persons asks for a constant reflection on one's own behaviour. This is becoming too much for some pupils and so they depart after a while to continue their study exclusively at home. Those who do stay, will see that also the organizational activities which one would not directly heap together with mysticism, indirectly have a big impact on their mystical development. Especially the being together with other personalities is the ideal manner of getting to a revaluation of one's own standpoints, and to the harmonically dealing with any differences of opinion. A student who has affiliated with a visible fraternity and not only studies at home but also joins an affiliated body there to meet fellow students, may be confronted with the question whether he must and may contribute to the organization of the fraternity. It is the motivation that he has which matters. When he is not merely studying to gain from it himself, and feels very strongly about the ideals of his fraternity, he may decide to put into action his working power and other abilities, to try to make the fraternity flourish as an organization and to keep it intact.

The question whether a mystical student can do without a visible fraternity can be answered with 'yes' and 'no'. Some students can very well walk the mystical path without being affiliated with a fraternity, in the sense of a fraternal organization. They do not need the immediate contacts with fellow students. This may be due to the circumstance that they are individualistic or introvert. The participating in (ritual) group work curbs some students in their functioning, for instance because it makes them feel too much attached to their senses, or because they have to be too active outwardly. Perhaps they feel less happy in big companies than in small ones and prefer to study at home, without people around. Nonetheless also individualistic members can enjoy some kinds of meetings, for instance when meditations are held during them.

There is yet another brotherhood, and that is the one on a psychical, spiritual level. Of this brotherhood one can not become a member in a physical manner. A mystical student who does not seek affiliation with a visible brotherhood - but also the student who does, but further meets no students at meetings - constitutes part of a psychical whole. It is shaped by the ideals that a lot of people have been working on during a longer period of time. The ideals get shape through certain people who feel inspired to go to work with them. Like minds always find each other. Hence that now and then they unite in interest groups. Each of these has an effluvium that is attractive to somebody who harmonizes with it. So the joined members constitute part of a psychical organization, and also mystical students who find a fraternity that they join, will constitute part of a psychical organization, namely that of their fraternity. Yet even the pupil who works solitary will be able to be attuned to a psychical brotherhood, for it forms that which in mystic circles is called the Great White Brotherhood. Keeping in touch with this psychical brotherhood means being attuned to a spiritual image that actuates us (effluvium, ideals). Perhaps this image manifests itself best within a visible fraternal organization, for it is a suited

channel, a medium, through which the spiritual, idealistic and archetypal can make themselves known. The students undergo spiritual experiences during the visible meetings. This is of vital importance to their inner lives. Many students are individualists who would prefer to withdraw in their own sanctum, or in nature, or to function in a small group of intimi. Yet many are visibly present in their brotherhood. Among other things because in the outside world there is very little room for a mutual, spiritual reception. In a mystical fraternity the cooperation with others is like a laboratory situation, with which one goes to great lengths to bring the mystical teachings into practice. Students who attune to the psychical body of their fraternity acquire an energy that connects them with all members. Within the mystical work some are called to become healers or philosophers. Others easily make personal contacts and can assist their fellow students in problematic situations. Others have a conceptive mind. They form mental images about the future or the doctrines of the fraternity. They are the planners. Another important group are the executors. They make the mental images become manifest. But among the members are also the helpful personalities who take care of the buildings, the administration et cetera. There are students who feel a constant pulling from on high, a certain exaltation, and who every second of their lives try to maintain that bond and to strengthen it. They have a contemplative role that can express itself in great activity as well. Then there are the students who rather be passive. They must have room for this. For all, the question what to do with their life comes first. What do they expect of it? Even better: in what respect do they open themselves to a higher intelligence; in what respect are they open to guidance by their inner consciousness?

When the path that we want to walk is clear to us, and we analyse our own nature, our needs and wants, then we know on the basis thereof what we may expect of working together with other students within a fraternal organization. The purpose of a fraternal organization is, to be an Alma Mater for the joined members where they can develop themselves and exchange ideas with other students. From their membership they try to develop themselves personally, and to attune to the inner self and become better human beings. Everybody benefits from this: the mystical pupil, the organization and the outside world. Of the good things that we receive in the fraternity, we can always and anywhere distribute the fruits. It is not necessary to do this within the fraternity. The best work that an esoteric school can perform for social welfare is offering mankind a tested and approved method to attune to one's inner self. It is not possible for the school to work at all visible levels in society, or participate in all kinds of philanthropic activities. It cannot divide its energy between too many spheres of interest. It has its own method of participating, in the shape of working for the enlightening of the minds of others. The providing of the method is its philanthropic work and with this it keeps to its actual task. We would not ask a person who is cleaning up the huge lenses of a colossal lighthouse why he is not at the helm of all the ships in the sea, avoiding them from colliding and hitting the coast and the rocks. One is either at the ship's helm or at the lighthouse. An esoteric school shows us a way to make us more aware of the inner and outer faculties that we have. We have inner and outer senses, and in the centre of the mystical study are particularly those senses which, when they are awakened, enable us to contact our inner self. When we have learned how to balance the different energies that can be found inside us and in the world around us, we shall achieve harmony. Once we have attained harmony, which is not necessarily the same as 'enlightenment', we shall have a finely attuned instrument to weigh the ins and outs of most decisions in our lives.

In the affiliated bodies of an esoteric school we can meet other members who are with us on the same path. In a way we are not on the same path, for we all try to follow the voice of our own

inner selves. But we will come to realize that the harmony that we experience with them is an impetus for us to continue our sometimes lonely quest. There are however still very many students who prefer to study in the privacy of their homes, and who do not appear at the material portal of the fraternity with which they are associated. The picture that outsiders (and also the members of a mystical organization) have of a mystic, is very consonant with this. I have once seen this phrased by someone as follows: "When I think of a mystic or a student of the arcane knowledge, I usually envision a solitary person studying and reflecting in an environment of symbology and mystery, surrounded by a peaceful and somewhat monastic setting. This appears to be the perfect scenario for gaining enlightenment and wisdom." A place of seclusion may seem to be important for us because we associate it with the best possible environment where we can work undisturbedly. But sometimes I wonder what better place there is to hide, what better surroundings for the one who wants to go unnoticed, than the midst of the utmost turbulence, where it is as in the eye of the hurricane. Our true development is always in relation to that turbulence, which sometimes is nothing but the finest choir of musical harmony.

92. Ritual paraphernalia

Spiritually seen, the advantage of ritual work lies in the fact that a human being is very sensitive to atmosphere and symbolism. There are many circumstances in which an appeal is made on that quality. Whether it is about a birthday, festivities, memorial services, the choice of the restaurant where we are about to eat, or the kind of art and lighting that we want to install in our homes, the factor atmosphere is of great importance. If we want to divulge ourselves we do this through susceptibility to, and choice of, certain atmospheres. Conversely, where the material world stops offering us information through our senses, atmosphere takes over the role of provider of information. Therefore, for a mystical student not the control over the laws of nature is the first of his exertions, but attunement, the most important instrument for him to reach his goal. Attunement helps him ahead the most quickly, and from attunement arises control. It can be desirable to quickly have means at our disposal that evoke this attunement, this special state of mind. By working with a set repetition of actions, words et cetera, we make a steady atmospheric description within which inner impressions can make themselves be heard better and quicker. This is what a ritual intends to do. A regular build of texts, images and attributes, enables us to create the right atmosphere that consequently can lead to attunement to our inner self. A ritual can be held periodically or occasionally, in a room specially intended for it, or at home in a separate room. The more it is repeated in the same room, and certainly when it is repeated in the same fashion, the less time it takes to create the right atmosphere and consequently achieve the desired attunement. Repetition is the magic word. Keeping all the ritual features equal gives rest and peace. It averts that we must familiarize with new elements over and over. The regular ritual does not distract and quickly leads to attunement.

There is an exception to the rule that the repeating of the same elements in a ritual is desired, and this occurs with an initiation. There new things are necessary so that the candidate undergoes a lasting impression. During an initiation his objective and subjective consciousness must be woken up. New lessons are inculcated into him and he must remain alert because he is about to make or renew momentous vows. With every mystical initiation however a moment of stillness or meditation will be inserted, for the new things must get the opportunity to be digested inwardly at the spot, even if only for a short moment. Later, when everything has sunk in, it becomes a definite part of the personality of the candidate. The ritual therefore is an impressive, subjective, intellectual, emotional, psychological and spiritually charged event. Although it is a solemn moment, it is not a dejected event. Candidates, initiators and visitors consider it a joyful occurrence. Later it evokes pleasant memories.

The texts for reflection, the attributes, attires and symbols, lift up the candidate and just through that, cause a joyful event. It is a step forward to a more fully developed life. When attributes are used during the ritual in which they are needed, they have a special function. They clarify the laws of nature that are dealt with. During rituals it happens that candles are lit or extinguished. They are extinguished at the close of a ritual, but it also happens during a ritual. This has a symbolical meaning. It indicates that a transmutation takes place. There is no destruction of matter but only a change of shape. That is the lesson to be found in extinguishing a candle. Normally during rituals a candle is not blown out but extinguished with an extinguisher. The blowing out is refrained from because it is a much less elegant way of extinguishing than with an extinguisher. Also for practical reasons an extinguisher is preferred, because it prevents the spilling of candle-grease. The central point remains that the extinguishing of the flame

demonstrates and illustrates a mystical law. The directly visible manifestation of light ceases to exist. In essence it does not matter whether we extinguish the candle with an extinguisher or blow it out, or extinguish it with fingers made wet. The final result is the same in all cases. The mystical, symbolical view that the extinguished light does not really die, does not mean that the extinguishing for that reason should take place with an extinguisher. For, with the breath that we use to blow out a candle also the breath of life can be symbolized, or the fact that with the breath life comes and goes. In that sense the blowing out of the candles during a ritual might be preferable to the extinguishing of the flame with an extinguisher.

Once the ritual has ended, the candle has become a normal utensil again. There seems to be a reason to store apart objects that have served in a sacred meeting, after such a meeting. This with the argument that they have become the bearers of an atmosphere that may not be desecrated. There are mystical students that keep handling candles deferentially in general, because candles are used in ritual meetings and initiations. However, in everyday life we should not deal rigidly with common objects that are also found in rituals. There is nothing wrong with locking up candles that are actually used during a ritual, and to exclusively destine them for future rituals, but we should not attribute a special meaning to candles that we use any other way. This is to say, we should not have to approach them with the care that is customary during a ritual. A candle is and remains an ordinary object. It shows little insight into the meaning of a ritual when we consider a candle to be a ritual object everywhere and at all times, even outside the context of a ritual.

There is no regulation that says that we should be deferential towards a candle. If aside from the rituals we keep using the candle in a ritual manner in cases that it is applied as a normal utensil to give light, we have a demonstration of acting magically. Only within a ritual there is a mystical intention and meaning. Outside the ritual the mystical aspect gets lost, or rather, there it is not under discussion. Firstly because the symbolical value is no longer valid when the candle is simply and solely used to give light. Secondly because the candle originally had a purely domestic meaning, and still has an incontestably practical, nonmystical value. It is of course possible to continue making a symbolical use of the candle aside from the ritual setting, for instance during Christmas time or on a birthday cake, or to increase the atmosphere. We can assign a value to an attribute. This value is just as valid as any other one that coincidentally we have not attached to it and that somebody else wants to attribute to it. When in profane matters a profane object, aside from the context of the symbolical, is treated as a symbol, it overshoots its target. It then degrades to a magical attribute. This goes for everything that is applied within a ritual: salutations, the striding instead of walking, shaking hands, the wielding of a sword. When we meet somebody in town, do we not greet him very differently from when he would face us during a ritual? To mix up these situations gives a grotesque image and does not meet the demands of the moment anymore. Hence that we should face two things: an attribute is an attribute. In a symbolical environment it can be used as a symbol. Outside this context it is a profane attribute; an object that can be applied for a common purpose.

93. Development

The making of mistakes belongs to the gaining of experiences. The alternative is, to do nothing, but then we are subject to all the turns of fate. Someone who wants to consciously direct his development, takes for granted the possibility that he will make mistakes. As said before, there is only one way to avoid making mistakes, which is: to do nothing. But is it ever possible to exert no influence and do nothing? It seems inevitable to make choices and exert actions. We constantly and unconsciously have goals. If we would not want to have goals consciously, we would have to bring to a standstill all the functions of our body. Even if we would like to have it otherwise, we consciously and unconsciously direct our lives, and with that errors and mistakes can be made. There always remains an inherent urge in any living creature to do something or become something, which originates from forces beyond its control. Yet it is therefore in complete, relative harmony with them, so - through that - the situations in which it finds itself are in fact 'wished', as we have seen earlier in this connection. This seems to apply even better when the creature has a less complex build, like a cell. Here the willpower seems to be shaped by a higher kind of will. But in this respect we would hesitate to talk about a free choice.

When we seem to be passive, everybody nonetheless will be able to establish that we are heading in a certain direction with our life. It is actually inconceivable that we would live a life in which we are totally inert, show no single sign of willpower. Even if it is very minimal, a directional guidance is emanating from us, a leading activity. This by the way is not the same as the purposeful directing our life, let alone in a mystical manner. For that a wholly different kind of energy or impelling force must be applied. We develop ourselves on three levels: the physical, the mental and the psychical. They are mutually in relative harmony. This is to say that they are harmonic as a whole, because they exert and attract influences that belong to each other; but the relations of this being that is harmonic in itself and in balance, can very well be disharmonic from our individual point of view, from our image of physical and mental health. As an example may serve, that somebody who prolongedly gets excited about all kinds of matters, undergoes the physical consequences thereof. A quickened heartbeat, overstrain and high blood pressure come into being when the body and the mental frame try to adapt to each other until they are balanced. All the levels of our personality permanently work towards a kind of equilibrium, with which 'justice' is done to the situation that has been created by us. When pressure is exerted on an element in our personality, a reaction in the other parts is aroused. A balance will come into being. Although all the elements are now in relative harmony, we can be satisfied or dissatisfied with the result. For instance, through biting off more than we can chew, a mental overpressure arises evoking a physical reaction, which renders a 'fitting' situation, like overstrain or heart problems. It is a situation of equilibrium to be sure, but not one with which we will be satisfied, for it does not fit in the ideal image that we have of ourselves. If we do not alter such a condition with which we are not satisfied but leave it for what it is, we will develop further accordingly. But of course there are situations with which we are satisfied, for instance with the peace profound that is the result of a life in harmony. Because there is a pattern in the foregoing, it can be put that when one of the elements of our personality gets much attention (for instance we are going to exert ourselves mentally to develop ourselves mystically), the remaining elements (the body, our deeper psychical abilities) will want to follow this development, to keep the balance. A healthier mind will exercise a more positive influence on the health of the body. In a life in which one does not strain oneself to develop oneself, everything moves with difficulty, or it moves easily but with little substance. The life in which one struggles to grow spiritually, has a

rich contents, because the spiritual world is added as a completely new one to the world already known. Through that our physical body will become magnetic, more energetic, vitalized.

No life is long enough to deal with all things at the same time and develop them. Some things are just new to us, and we may be specializing in other ones. As well as we think it normal that a skillful carpenter is not necessarily a good mason as well, it should be natural in our eyes that also to a mystically schooled human being there are terrains on which he feels uncomfortable because he has not yet been able to familiarize with them. Our growth in the mystical field can form a contrast with the rest of our life. Outsiders will not easily get the impression that we are one-sided, and when they observe us they will not easily get bored. For when we begin to unfold inwardly, people will not at all times be able to keep track of us and understand us. We have now established that we are constantly developing; that there is no alternative for development because it is not possible to stop it; that making mistakes is inevitable and understandable; that in our development we always look for a situation of equilibrium; and that we cannot control everything. There are many hardworking students who often mean that they do not advance because, from the fact that they repeatedly make the same mistakes, they derive that their progress stagnates. But when they exert themselves, this in itself is a token that they make progress and therefore they deserve every respect and support. We think that we have to see results at once, and when they fail to occur we think that we stagnate. Nonetheless we make progress.

We are constantly talking about the mystical student, but what about the nonmystic? When a mystical student still makes mistakes, must not the progress of the nonmystic look terrible? First let us establish that it is not so simple to indicate the difference between both. From the fact that somebody is not a mystic it may not be deduced that therefore he is not spiritually developed. In fact it is difficult as it is, to indicate when somebody is developed, and also if somebody can be called a mystical student. When with a mystic is meant somebody who is a member of an organization that provides mystical tuition, or who presents himself as a mystic pupil, then this is clear enough. But there are also people who in their thinking and acting follow the path of the mystical student without designating themselves as mystical students, or being connected to a mystical school. All will in their development experience certain problems and make mistakes. Every path, mystical or very profane, brings with it its own problems. There is no reason to assume that a mystical student has an easier life or performs better than a nonmystic or vice versa.

Does mystical development go slowly or abruptly? If after a number of years we look back, it strikes us that our development not always goes evenly. It appears that so much is stirred up, especially in the beginning, that one psychical impression after another comes to the surface. Strange phenomena often occur. After some time they decrease and it becomes quiet. Then we wonder whether we do something wrong, have lost our attunement, or do not work intensively enough. It looks as if we are building a house, for with that almost the same phenomena occur. Let us just make a blueprint of that, and explore how much the building activities of a house resemble those of a spiritual personality. Building a new house often requires the tearing down of old buildings. Then new foundations are laid and a new building is erected. A contractor takes months, even years, to complete what is on paper. He begins with the blueprints of the architect, then hires helpers, sees to it that he has the right equipment available on the construction site and then starts to work. He takes all the time he needs. When one day we

walk past the building once again, we suddenly do not see any activity anymore. The months after that, it remains as quiet. It is just as if the workmen have gone away and as if the building plan through lack of inventiveness of the builders was abandoned. Yet we see most buildings being completed in a miraculous way after some time. Meantime they have not been left without life as much as it looked. This is how we feel sometimes too. Building a house resembles building a spiritual house, working on a spiritually developed personality. So it resembles ourselves and the constructing of inner growth.

What was it about the house again? When the soil lies still fallow a conception is made by the architect. In the mind the building is sketched and a blueprint of it is drafted. The first building phase concerns the laying of the foundation. This is a spectacular sight and it appears that those involved, outsiders included, are very interested in what is happening. After the foundation has been laid, building material is dragged back and forth. Bricks are laid and hammering is going on and still every phase can be clearly distinguished and the result is immediately visible. When all this is over, every outer racket disappears as by magic. The scaffolds are removed and most of the building material is transported away. Inside the house there is much detailed working going on. The floor is finished. There is plastering and walltapering going on. Tiling is being done and the electrical wiring is refined. The more the house reaches its completion, the more refined the attention is, that is given to the details. Seen from the outside the work is at a standstill for months, but not for the one who is better informed. At a fixed point in the development the work will be completed. Then from one day to the next the house is opened. The residents move in and complete the destination of the building, that now is suddenly filled with life.

In a similar way the building up of a mystical personality comes about. The first months or years of the study are the time in which the whole personality undergoes its greatest transformation. The ground on which the building of our old personality is found, is not completely dug over. The old building must only in part give way to a new building. There is no overall demolition. It is more a renovation, that is, a renewal. It yields visible changes of the interior and exterior of the building, in our entire personality therefore. Near a structure there normally are big plates indicating who are the initiators and contractors. In the beginning of our development we may take to the street to let everybody know what we have discovered, what we are engaged in. We as it were erect big plates to make known to everybody what grand work is being done here. As the work progresses a refining of the activities takes place. No much attention is being attracted any longer. The great truths in the meantime have been erected within our personality. The continuation of this, is the bringing into practice in a subtle manner the things that have been learned. Slowly wisdom develops. The organs and glands are still better capable of receiving the frequencies of the higher energies and of leading them into a good direction: the refining of the electrical system. Receiving a certain amount of enlightenment can be compared with the arrival of the residents who occupy the house. The house becomes more radiant, there is an abundance of activity and life. To open the house any key, provided it is picked up, can be moulded to fit the lock. In every chamber of the inner house pieces of valuable information can be found. Once understood and digested they procure a key to a next chamber.

A student can in no way skip part of his development to take up the study intended for a master. Any information to the contrary given to you is misleading and untrue. There is only one conceivable way to achieve such a jump, which is that a student lays aside all that he is involved with, and starts acting and living like a master. This however is just what he has yet to learn. As

students we all can learn a lot by listening to the wise counsel of the ones who preceded us. When a teacher teaches us how to build an electric machine, and instructs us how to put together the apparatus and apply the fuses, and ultimately teaches us how to connect everything to the electricity grid, we will clearly grasp the meaning of those instructions. If we apply the wrong fuses, connect the wire to the wrong power supply and take the bare machine with its running parts in our hands without any protection, we will find out very quickly why the teacher with his great experience warns us against a wrong proceeding. We would run the danger of a severe shock, and something might go terribly wrong. The same goes for the developing of our inner life related to the functioning of our physical bodies. If our entire 'machine' on the inside and outside is not developed according to the safety instructions drawn by the 'mystical engineers' on the basis of centuries of experience, we contract severe shocks in our system if anything causes it to be overpowered. I have seen several instances of people who were actually the victim of this, and who ended in a mental institution. There is every reason to undertake the mystical study with small steps, and to learn from those who before us have studied certain processes. This may be somebody who has investigated the results of water dripping on one and the same spot for aeons. Knowing the effects of time he understands that the hole in the hard stone is caused by the prolonged, unremitting dripping. Now someone comes along who sees the hole in the stone and the very slow dripping of the water. When he is not aware of the laws of nature, he might say: "Why waiting for centuries until the water has made a hole in the stone; give me a large tank of water and I shall spill it over the rock at once. That will do the trick." But the point is, that the result will then be nil point nil. Every attempt to quicken a development without expertise, and this certainly goes for the psychical realm as well, is doomed to fail. The working in our private laboratory (a home sanctum), or in our joint laboratories (affiliated bodies of a fraternity), will only slowly trigger a development similar to the one we find in the alchemical depictions of inner ovens, where things have to ripen. The basic teachings are like elements that are thrown into the inner fire, where the gold will slowly extricate itself from the earthly cinders. Our fraternity is like an alchemical crucible. Sometimes the fire burns harder and then the contents, the gold ore, is boiling, and fiery sparks are flying all over the place. But then the fire is tempered again periodically, and finally the cinders are put aside and that which remains is the gold. Maybe it is necessary to hasten the process once in a while, to quicken the fire, in order to get to the gold earlier. But it may also be, that a temperate fire makes for purer gold.

Which are the personal aspects that must be trained? What is the field of the mystic endeavour? How can one 'learn' mysticism? In several philosophical systems and therapies twelve steps are found to achieve something. The number twelve seems to be of some importance. However, guidelines can be randomly divided into any number of steps. The numbers three, seven, ten or twelve may be very obvious to choose, because they are culture related. Three: the number of the Holy Trinity; seven: the lucky number; ten: the number of the decimal system and the Ten Commandments; twelve: the number of the duodecimal system and the twelve apostles. I have tried to couple a number of steps to a number of mystical principles for training the mystical life.

the requirements

1. The Greek adagium 'Know Thy Self'. Everything begins with this. Knowledge about one's true position at a certain moment in time is the starting point to change the circumstances.

2. The way to any change goes through realizing that our own forces are limited, and that attuning to the inner self and forming a channel for it, give a great amount of energy.
3. Help in its best shape should come from within. When we are attuned to the inner self, in a meditative state of mind or through concentration or contemplation, we have the best guide in life.
4. Trust both the outcome of meditation and of reason, and do not neglect the importance of balancing both ways of gaining knowledge.
5. Our own willpower should be put aside to let a higher positive power, the inner Master, take over the lead, in order that he may direct us.
6. It is good to share - without the shrouds of the ego - with others what we feel and think. We can learn from others, as they may have valuable experiences and insights.
7. It depends on the nature of the highest powers whether we can be helped.
8. We should be aware of an important side of the Law of Compensation, namely that we should share our benefits and insights with others.
9. The Law of Compensation also includes that we should compensate for any wrongdoing.
10. Conscious development leads to personal insight. When applied it makes us act rightly and avoid negative behaviour. When we have learned how to walk the mystical path, we can use our new experiences over and over again. It takes constant reminders to keep walking the path that we have chosen.
11. Exercise patience. Nature takes its time for everything.
12. Nature is in balance. We are part of it and should be in balance too. We must listen to our inner selves to be able to make the right decisions and through it build the right experiences. With mysticism it is not so much a matter of learning how to master a series of mystical 'fields'. Mysticism is a study that is more elementary. It is about letting the inner self speak in every circumstance of life. It is just as with learning to write. There it is no matter either what we eventually want to write as soon as the writing lessons have ended. Writing is a basic art and later it can be applied anywhere. Just as with writing lessons there are methods in mysticism. In mysticism the set of instruments consists of meditation, contemplation and concentration, plus the discussing of mysticism itself, which in fact is a paradox. Mysticism is an art and a skill, with which the results can be taught and established in a logical manner all the time. The student for instance, after having meditated repeatedly, can establish whether this has been of influence on his mental capacity, his physical well-being, his inner balance. It seems that the mystical way offers many advantages. It leads to equilibrium, attunement to the inner self and to harmony and knowledge. So it seems logic that all human beings would choose that path to walk. Now one would assume that logic is just that: 'logical', for everybody. If this were the case everybody should turn into a mystic at once, for it is logical that there is no better way to develop oneself than by trying to be open to one's own inner voice. But life is more complicated. For what we

call 'logic' (as if it were a law of nature) is not logical for everybody at all, as we all can see, for there are many convinced nonmystics. We may try to explain to another person that working on our inner development changes our state of mind. A nonmystical person most often will be quite able to understand such an explanation intellectually. However, what a true mystical experience is, must be experienced. Even that there are mystical experiences is beyond the scope of a lot of people. And this is why they remain deprived of a mystical, inner fire. Logic seems to be an aspect of development, changing with this development. One may only wonder what changes in our logic will take place when we progress on the path. It is by no means certain that the logic of the mystics is everlasting. As it looks now, the esoteric school from our time will continue with applying the methods of education from the past. In this school things are no different from a normal school. The student will expect his chemistry teacher to master chemistry, his English teacher to speak English well. These are the minimum conditions to keep the student's mind on the subject. For the development of some pupils it is necessary that the master shows them his weak spots. For other pupils that he only shows them his strong spots. For others yet that he shows them both his weak and his strong sides. Just like at an ordinary school, in the esoteric school it is the person of the teacher that is important. One is attracted to mysticism by an inner need, somewhat like when one chooses from vocation the education for a certain profession. The first real confrontation that the student has in his education, is with the teachers of his school. Their knowledge, insight, inspiration and behaviour will among other things determine whether he will continue with his study. This is a fact with an ordinary school, and it will be no different with the mystic school.

the obstacles

It does not seem wise to make a simplification of the causes that lead to conflicts in the world, but yet I dare say that there are six elements that may always play a part in it. Whether we look at the conflicts between politicians, the conflicts at work or between family members, they always show one or more of the following aspects.

- 1) Dogmatism. Accepting on the authority of someone else that one has to act and think as one does, with neglecting the voice of the inner self.
- 2) Lack of sense of perspective. The inability to see things in a broader perspective, and not to make absolute one's own judgement.
- 3) Lack of humour. Deadly, unreal seriousness, to the point of absurdism.
- 4) Lack of self-mockery. The inability not to take oneself too seriously.
- 5) Greed. To enforce one's rights, even if it is about total futilities.
- 6) Egoism/egocentrism. The will to get one's own standpoint through for one's own grandeur, no matter what. This working of the ego is just as condemnable when it is about the striving after lofty ideals, as when it concerns viewpoints that are detrimental for civilization.

These shortcomings sometimes ensue from each other.

How does the student assess whether he has learned something from his esoteric school? Someone asked: "When climbing the mountain, how does one know when a step forwards has been made, or a slide backwards - hallucination, delusion, illusion?" Once I was crossing a large parking space and found that I could not walk straight to the other side of the street. I had to

walk a little detour and from there got to the point where I intended to arrive in the first place. I at once saw the parallel with the mystical path. Sometimes the only way to get somewhere is any way but the straight line, also in mysticism. Sometimes, when climbing the mountain to reach the top, we ascend and then have to descend a bit, from which the climb continues that gradually leads us to the top. There is only one way to know if we have reached our destination, and that is: to be there.

Sometimes life is tossing us about and then meditating is difficult, even though meditating just would be the best thing to regain balance and harmony. There is no sense in forcing ourselves into a meditative state of mind. Nature cannot be forced. Being complaisant is the best attitude to life. Suppose we are on a large mountain river, in a boat that goes downstream. We would lose a lot of energy by trying to row upstream. But when we let the boat flow downstream, we only have to exert ourselves very little to steer it into a branch on either side. It brings us new vistas and new roads to explore.

94. Child's play

When we see a child play, we see this play as the activity of a child, as child's play. What exactly happens when a child is absorbed in its play? It manages to achieve a maximum of concentration, visualization and meditation with a minimum of means. It can play with cubes of wood or a bucket with sand for hours. It contains a big lesson for us. A child playing raises questions about the highest human capabilities. If a child manages to get these capabilities going with simple means, what then should not we as adults achieve with our means. Or is that a delusion? Must we be like a child, or rather like an adult? A child that expresses itself in a natural way, we call spontaneous. For instance we say for approval or disapproval of some behaviour: "Children will be children", because the child's conduct is seen as something belonging to a certain age bracket. But the essence of being a child comprises more than the child being young. The child has just returned from the cosmic realm and that is visible. What other explanation do we have for our world-wide esteem for the child? Most children are natural, unspoiled, spontaneous. To us it is not only a token of how the world can be, but also of how the beauty of nature is manifested in a human being when he is open to his inner self. Our attitude towards children is twofold, if not ambivalent. Though on the one hand we consider the child as a young, incomplete human being, we at the same time consider it the measure for an attitude towards life that would befit adults, that they should even make their own. On the one hand children are not taken seriously, on the other hand they are considered purer and more spiritual than adults. On the one hand they are not yet allowed much, but on the other hand we recognize that they manifest a little piece of heaven.

We feel that the child consists of two personages. It has a side that is pure and unspoiled, being the reflection of the realm from where the child has just come. The other side of the child is the more coarse, material one, needing education and formation. The child must be educated intellectually and physically, mentally also, although we also see that in this child a light shines that has been completely extinguished in so many adults already. This may be the answer to the question what the real difference is between the child and the adult. On the one hand it lies in the age of the physical body and in the education of body, mind and mental being. On the other hand we distinguish adults and children on the basis of their difference in revealing inner light. The balance between inner and physical functioning seems to be the real, distinctive difference. The natural ability to attune to the inner self distinguishes the child from the adult. The child is spontaneous and lives proceeding from the inner self. It is curious to behold how a child plays. It needs no complicated schooling or mystical tuition to be able to be up and at it for hours and hours in a state of complete concentration or meditation. Everything goes smoothly. When a human being has grown up, his ability to be silent and concentrated has largely retreated into the background. When he is lucky, he finds out in time that he misses something in his life. With the right assistance, of an esoteric school for instance, he can learn to blow the weak little flame that lives inside him. But this may have taken half a lifetime in the process.

What is it that man must develop when he enters this world? As a child we possess everything that we need in life, but we may lose it again. So it is not so much that we need to develop something, as that we must keep and cherish that which has already been developed. In mysticism it is taught that the outside world takes care of the outer body and that the mystical schools (and often the family as well) take care of the education of the soul personality. So the esoteric education seems to be the counterpart of the earthly schooling. Even if both schoolings

are ideally applied at the same time, a psychical awakening is only possible when the body is in harmony. Therefore the esoteric school, as the counterpart of the earthly schooling, is not in all respects a counterpart but rather the other half of a vital twofoldness. This is why mystical training also comprises attention for the physical, earthly body: how should it get rest, which food does it need, how can it fulfil its role as the vehicle for the inner self in the best possible way. So a mystical training is partly aimed at the body, from the viewpoint however that it is the basis for functioning spiritually. Mystical schooling certainly does not only take care of the inner sides of education, but definitely also assists in training the material side. This is wholly in conformity with the view that neither side of man must prevail. There must be an equilibrium between all his faculties. It is not so that somebody to be inwardly developed should only follow his esoteric school and need no longer master his normal school subjects.

There is yet another reason why the notion 'spiritual training' must be commented on. What do we mean by 'training spiritually'; what is it that is trained? In many mystical philosophies a number of levels is distinguished within the human personality. At the basic material level one talks about the body. It manifests an intellectual mind, and a mental and emotional awareness. The essence of man is his soul personality. This is a term comprising the most essential shapes of his functioning and consciousness. Finally many esoteric schools consider the soul personality to be part of a bigger whole, of a Soul, equalling or even being a part of, the cosmic, the Universe. The perspective of development, arising from the harmoniously coming together of the body and the spiritual personality, is as follows. The human body is seen as a material vehicle that at birth changes into an animated being. This material vehicle may show countless defects. It may be ill or deformed. The senses may or may not work well, and some have already been shut off at birth, which may mean blindness or deafness. In the course of life the senses and other abilities decrease as to their functioning. In short, the vehicle is or is not, or to a lesser degree, capable of fully expressing a lifegiving principle. We should not use the term 'fully developing' here, but more about that further on.

Man's inner powers, his mental, intellectual and emotional capacity, can only express themselves when his vehicle, his body, is capable of it. All powers that can manifest themselves through the material vehicle make out man. The child, having been born with a vehicle in which spiritual principles can be expressed, needs tuition to prepare this vehicle for its task, because without some help it is not capable of manifesting everything that is within its reach. Through schooling and education all kinds of centres in the vehicle, among which the brain, are attuned to some kind of functioning. The child receives examples and assumes them, repeats and reflects, and through this miraculous play of absorbing, digesting and expressing, it grows towards a more complete state in which it may consciously fulfil a role. The material vehicle of the child does not control everything right away. With the right education it can learn how to make its vehicle go the way that in principle it should be able to go. In its reflection of everything that we consider innocent and heavenly, we always end up with the child.

Now when this child grows up and shapes its life, we see a personality develop that directs its future, and moreover can be inspired by promptings from above. The child develops qualities which sometimes were visible before, latently, but sometimes also they seem to emerge out of nothingness. Within its human personality something is developed, but we just do not know whether it was there before - but only in rudimentary form - or was not there at all. The esoteric school takes care of the inner person, of the soul personality, that represents the spiritual,

individual characteristics. The soul personality can be influenced and trained. The sooner this is started, the better. An esoteric school gives its inner tuition to students who are grown up. So there is every chance that a considerable part of their lives has already passed in which they have been deprived of tuition that is of such major importance to the tender child. This means that instead of giving education to a child, that is still accessible, the esoteric school begins with the inner schooling rather late. It is irrefutably a pity that this is so, for the child has the advantage over the adult that it is impressionable, open to everything that it is about to experience in this life. The more spiritual the first lessons are that are imparted to the child, the more it will have a better basis to learn everything else in life. The child may have negative inclinations which in the tender beginning of the child's life are not so overt. But a negative tendency may not get the opportunity to develop further. The counterpressure needed for that, comes about through the mystical tuition; at least, this is the most suited instrument for it. The negativism should be neutralized. This can only be done well when it has not firmly anchored yet. With young children this anchoring is not yet present. Through this, and through the inner schooling that they receive in the beginning of their lives much is determined about the course of their further lives.

In general we consider the child as the rendering of everything that is beautiful and unspoiled. Children offer hope to humanity. This can stay this way and be reinforced when we ourselves manage to maintain the attitude of the child. We can learn from the child and from an adult, for both in the child and the adult the working of cosmic patterns is visible. In the beginning of this paragraph we said that the child's play contains a big lesson for us. It is as much curious and instructive to watch the child grow up being active as an adult. The little child has grown up, takes responsibilities on its shoulders and builds on the world. That is worth our amazement. The child teaches us something special, namely that an open mind may reveal love and susceptibility.

95. Repetition

Everything in nature is a repetition. The continued instilling of lessons of life, at school, at work or during the upbringing, is the means with which we direct developments and lay down possibilities. Repetition may also become a burden. Then it is a symptom of getting stuck in the past. In its worst shape it utters itself in mental illness, like when somebody constantly punishes himself because of the suffering that he has once inflicted or suffered. Also the remaining stuck in attention for former incarnations is not healthy. Please mind that we are talking about 'remaining stuck'. Investigating the laws that govern our psychical lives and therefore also reincarnation, belongs to the mystical work. But when the past becomes an obsession that thwarts our proceeding in the present time, there is cause for alarm. Exploring the past must serve a purpose in our present life. Are the usable things that can shed light on the past a justification for our present life or do they only lead to frustrations? Do we really need the information from the past, and is it always present? When we go back to a town or street where we have lived before in our present life, we can sometimes hardly imagine that we are the person who lived there and has gone through so many experiences on that spot. And this in one and the same incarnation. Does it serve us to dwell long upon that phase? It does when we try to hold on to the good memories, without forgetting that we live in the present. A retrospect may be very useful and evoke love, warmth and emotion. Repeating them in the mind may improve life.

A totally different form of repetition confronts some persons who have taken up their mystical study after having stopped with it for a considerable time, and who start again at the very first starting point. Does the repetitive principle, that we see everywhere around us, also apply to such a situation, in the sense that it is useful to fall back on matters from the past in order to enable the continuation of our development? There is no general answer to it. It takes a lifetime to walk and study the mystical path. Going back to old lessons can be necessary to continue on the path. And participating in new tuition means the same: we pick up new lessons and these will lead us on the path also.

Studying and applying mystical teachings is like giving our inner flywheel a swing. If we are idle afterwards, the wheel will go slower and slower. But when we give it a new impulse, it gains new momentum. When you walk the mystical path you will no doubt recognize this. What we need are continuing impulses that keep us going, taking into account that the continuance of this flow is just as important as its diversity. Performing mental exercises is a way to keep the flywheel running. With every step that we go forward we do this because we feel that success is within reach. We need small successes to keep up our wish to continue. Some of the results of our exercises are realized subconsciously when no immediate objective results can be established, just as when we learn how to play a musical instrument. We keep trying and after a while we see the results on the objective plane. Although the circumstances in our lives may not immediately change through performing mental exercises, there will be a change in our deeper being, and this change becomes visible in the long run. When we try to use the abilities that we have, and repeat this attempt over and over, something changes inside us. It is difficult to assess what that is, for it seems to be a kind of energy that increases in vigour each time, finally allowing us to achieve what we have in mind. Repetition leads to objective results, which are preceded by inner changes. This is why we usually stick to particular exercises until we succeed with them.

Any field that we try to master knows instances when we go on to another level of study, even if we do not master through repetition all the elements of the previous phases to the full. Mystical study has a manifold basis. There is the intellectual understanding of the facets with which mysticism occupies itself. Then there is the emotional understanding. Also there is the understanding that comes from personally experiencing the things that have been imparted to us. And there is the spiritual understanding. The things that we try to master will have to be preceded by one or more of these kinds of understanding, and more of them can be thought of. When we go on without mastering everything, we make progress yet, through putting energy in repeating the preceding things over and over. However, it is not the case with everything that when we do not yet consciously master something, we will have it under control unconsciously. Only regarding some things an unconscious control will come into existence, for instance when we try to become a considerate human being by changing ourselves. The first time it will not work, the second time it will not work, but by working on it gradually, we will unconsciously have grown towards a different demeanour. Suddenly we may then realize that some change has come about in us unnoticed. In such a situation obviously an unwitting growth has been going on. When we try to change the colour of a candleflame through power of the mind, there is a basis for supposing that even if we do not yet visibly master this exercise, we will already learn to activate the force that eventually will make the flame colour change. The mental exercise has an influence on our inner life, where the repetition may have exercised its influence. So we will have to analyse carefully what kinds of exercises we do, and which exercises let open the assumption that - although they do not give visible results at once - they may have changed something (or us). It is difficult to understand the mechanism behind it. Likewise, when we learn how to play a musical instrument, how comes that if we try to play a composition ten or twenty times we do not master it, but if we have tried it say a hundred times or more we can?

96. Natural state

It is sometimes said that human beings stray from their natural state. The industrialized society, our eating habits, our science et cetera, would no longer reflect the natural human being. But is not exactly our culture a rendering of our natural ability to ever change shape and get farther removed from earlier stages? This then would mean that we do develop more and more of ourselves. Not that we become more and more natural, because from our former and present state it only becomes evident that we are subjected to our own capability to change. It is not easy to keep a grip on changes. All too often we think that they lead us away from our natural state. Modern developments, like the Internet, space exploration, computing techniques, genetic manipulation, evoke such feelings. A well-known thesis is that human relations decrease and become more unnatural. The internet user locks himself up behind his keyboard and then tries to reach the world. With that he remains at a safe distance from everything that he might dislike in a real personal contact. From a standpoint that the real human contact starts when two people are in each other's direct vicinity this is a logical conclusion. But when is such a personal contact really personal? At what ultimate distance must somebody stand away from us in order that we can still talk of a personal contact? We have grown accustomed to the telephone for years now, and do not consider contact by phone to be evidence of a decrease of our living conditions. We are accustomed to it. Would the Indians in earlier days have called the exchange of information through smoke signals a decrease of their contacts? The question may even be whether bodily contact should be secondary to mental communication, or at least deserve a similar place. And is mental contact not an important aspect of the Internet? It only becomes worrisome if next to the contact at a distance, we would neglect the other, physical contact.

By development is understood, the growth from a less perfect to a more perfect situation. Circumstances can be pleasant or unpleasant, worth striving after, or evoking with us the tendency to escape them. In other words, there are desired and undesired circumstances. Every circumstance, pleasant or unpleasant, can lead us to certain insights, and when that has happened we speak of development. The latter always remains possible, despite the circumstances, for those remain in motion during our entire life, even if we want to exert little influence on them. Development is influenced by numerous items, but their nature is no condition to gain insight.

The body and the mind can get out of balance during their development. The chemical composition of the body is under the influence of the soul personality. Just as much is the mental frame affected through that. This can assume a shape of joy or sadness, or of depression. In a number of cases negative mental conditions are treated with chemicals, in support of other methods to again balance somebody. Psychiatry is sometimes condemned for treating patients with chemicals, but on the other hand such a treatment need not be so bad at all when it is seen in a mystical perspective. For, the body is undone from its chemical imbalance, and a different state of the mind is the result. But then the question arises when and in how far we are 'real' when we function under the influence of any medicament, or of alcohol, coffee, drugs and so on. Any food that we take influences the balance in our body, and each influence brings us into another mental state, be it that in most cases they can hardly be distinguished from each other. Our deepest self seems to lie far beyond the levels of consciousness that are influenced by all kinds of chemicals in their wide variety. When we are subject to so many influences, is there a point when we can say that we are ourselves? And what exactly is that? It looks as if it is something that is not influenced by circumstances inside or outside us. Something that is rest

itself, a kind of mirroring, smooth lake the surface of which is stirred by nothing. We are not talking now about the spot that we seem to be able to reach only when in a state of profound meditation, where profound peace reigns. For with meditation it is about an area that we make contact with, and not about what we are ourselves.

In essence peace means that we are 'ourselves'. This does not mean that we should be flawless. But it will reflect in some way the attitude of positiveness rather than negativism. And a person of good will, will be recognized. Once I saw an old lady who came out of the supermarket with a cart. I was waiting for my mother in front of the door. The old lady went to her bike, put all the groceries in the bags of her bike, then turned to me and asked me: "Sir, would you be so kind to look after my bike for a moment? I have to go into the shop again to return the cart. But I am afraid someone will steal my things when I am inside." So I looked after her belongings, and when the lady came back she thanked me, took her bike and drove off. I myself could have been a thief, but when the lady came out of the supermarket she must have felt within a second: this gentleman is not a thief. That was her intuition, and what she sensed was what I would like to be recognized by. Incidentally, we sometimes think we follow our intuition and yet we are deceived. This may mean that what we hear inside, is not really our intuition, or that we indeed do follow an intuitive voice. It then does not seem to have the intention to lead us into a flawless situation, but - by virtue of karma - to let us make a wrong decision. I think that my thesis may lead to quite some discussion within the mystical community.

Our behaviour is judged by our environment, even if we can not always measure it. Who would not like to be well prepared his whole life through for situations in which he is the subject of an evaluation by his fellow man? The basis of such a preparation must be laid very early in life. A young human being must from the very first day be made familiar with all the principles and methods that give the inner self room to speak. There are lots of ways, for instance little stories, to make children receptive in a natural way for impressions of an inner nature. We can design tales or games in which these principles are repeated. Playing with a child along the principles of mysticism will make us see that playing and at the same time learning, will wonderfully match in the child's life. With applying 'mystical principles' is meant, that a balance is shown between light and dark, the senses, and the actions of man; that there is a time for acting with the intellect and a time for letting the inner self speak. In short, they are the principles that can also be found in fairy tales. Some people may hesitate to combine playing and learning, but it is not the case that knowledge of an intellectual nature is forced into the child's mind under the pretext that one is playing with the child. On the contrary, we may be very subtle in our understanding of what a child likes and needs when it is playing. We should let our children develop into what they are: personalities of their own kind, who have not yet blocked the way to their inner self. Have everything go about naturally, without feeling the need to direct the child into any direction. Let it have its dreams; they need not be explained. Let it find its roots into the past, without you feeling the need to make it receptive to any impressions from former incarnations. When the basic principles of upbringing are applied, everything else originates from that by itself.

Does the balance that we seek by developing positive aspects in our personality, require suppressing less nobler traits? For instance, should we attack the 'lower' elements in our character and what is their place in all of this? This question may lead to many discussions about the definition of those lower elements, such as aggression, desire and passion. To avoid this discussion we might draw up a list of things with which we are comfortable, and things with

which we are not. They should be seen as from our innermost standpoint. This means, not blurred by the standards of our time, place and culture. Just the things like we feel them from deeply within. When we have drawn up the positive list, we can make choices to improve what we already like. The other list needs more attention. Much of what we do is done for the sake of complying with the standards of other people. But do we think it right to do those things? Does it answer to the inner voice that we must follow? In short, is it natural and in harmony with our wise, inner counsellor? That is what counts. All types of character traits can be dealt with through the list that we draw up. Now that we have made up our mind about what we want to keep of this list, we need a thorough heart-searching. For not all the things that we want should be carried out. As Francis Bacon has said: "Although everything is possible, not everything is allowed." So the first step is, to put the question what we want, the second is what we are going to do with it. The answer to that should come from our deepest inner self too. There should always be a balance between what we want, and what we inwardly feel is allowed. The voices of our mind, our heart and our inner self need not conflict. For even what we as a world community have accepted over the years as the right thing to do, humanly speaking, is based on impulses that transcend the human mind. They may be 'natural', but we call them 'culture'.

97. Mysticism versus science

Some people question whether mystics should be scientific or not, and I can feel towards the one and the other viewpoint. This based on the apparent differing definitions of the notion 'scientific'. I think we all agree that science in the sense of an emotionless exercise of the mind - let us call it the Frankenstein-science - is horrific and leads to disasters. Further we might agree that the other side of science, the one we know for all the good inventions and discoveries that it has granted us, many of which are very useful and a blessing to mankind, cannot procure the things that make our lives really worth living, like understanding, compassion, love and the contact with our inner self. But even if science does not have all the answers to our questions and needs, we should still be scientific in our approach if we want to make mystic discoveries available to the world. This is to say, there is no reason why we should not apply the instruments of common science to the mystical field. These instruments are: logic, using our reasoning ability, the experiment, establishing the laws of nature, and trying to deal with phenomena in such a way that they can be reproduced. Such instruments are present in every real esoteric tuition. Then we see that mysticism as an esoteric art and science can be applied in rather the same way as regular science.

Reality can be established by our inner and outer senses and by reasoning, and this principle of mystical science is the same as in regular science and in normal life. In fact, many basic principles of science, like the inductive and deductive ways to obtain knowledge, are developed by mystics. Of course, science makes many mistakes, but so does the human mind if it refuses to think scientifically. Mistakes can be made with establishing what is true. The notion 'science' has a bad name, which offers many people a licence for not evaluating everything by the standards of science. On the other hand even inner promptings and personal experiences are 'scientific' methods to obtain knowledge. Therefore also that type of knowledge must adopt rules, for the sake of its survival. The fact that somebody tries to establish reality through the measures of science and logic, does not disqualify such a person. People often find the words science and logic cold and void of emotion. But science and mysticism can be full of bright and exquisite logic, of great beauty. With their analyses and methods the mystics try to free the world from fear and superstition, which can only take place by applying love and understanding, and even those have elements of the highest logic and science.

I think that the resistance of some people towards the terms 'science' and 'mysticism' has arisen through the many negative things that have come from the both of them over the years. True mysticism and true science seem to have escaped this by coincidence, so vehement have been the negative developments in both fields. Many so-called mystics have been guilty of black magic, abuse of power, manipulation of students, and of being woolly. And science went astray through supporting the weapons industry, being available for assistance at tortures and executions, developing means to reduce human beings to slaves and so on and so forth. But had we experienced, which would have been desirable, that science would have developed with a conscience, its results would on a broad front have been akin to those of true mysticism and we would not have seen these two opposed so often, but they would have gone hand in hand. We can use the scientific instruments to search our field of mystical interest, even if this would lead to the conclusion that what then becomes visible wholly depends on inner experience. Maybe we cannot prove to another person what we experience when we walk the mystical path, but if he is a real scientist and goes the path himself, he may share our experience, which for him is now

still just a theory. Experience is the best teacher and together with theory the basis of mysticism and science.

Some people are scientists by nature and realize that there are many things that are not known within the common fields of science. In addition to this they may also be mystics, and there are many things that are not known about mysticism too. This similarity might become the attractive force that connects them to a mystical fraternity, that is like a laboratory. Most fraternities never claim that they have all the answers to all the questions, but they show a way to investigate these queries. In doing so, they have for aeons formed underground universities, that are at present also aboveground, that have gathered awesome treasures, explored marvellous regions. Is it not a great adventure to be part of them and, if possible, add to them through explorations of our own? In the past and in the present many scientists have felt that to be true. There are many attractive fields of exploration for both mystics and physicists. There are many things with which physics could assist mysticism in its quests, for on many questions that mysticism is confronted with, physics and other scientific disciplines could shed their light. For instance, it is interesting to both fields to know whether a robot has a self-awareness when it is built regeneratively or is self-supporting, and how this awareness could be defined and measured. Some people think that there can be no talk of self-awareness, because the self-learning capacity of a robot is limited. A counter-argument is that the human learning ability or capacity for absorbing things is limited as well, and that in the infant stages man in fact starts almost completely blank. Man can stop his thoughts, his senses. A robot might do the same. Without a good definition of the notions 'self-knowledge' and 'soul personality' it cannot be determined what distinguishes man from an intelligent robot, unless we take into account the biological definition of what 'life' is, which is still something different from 'awareness'. Man himself establishes the definition. But what if a robot is capable of making such definitions? Would then humans by definition no longer be able or authorized to judge what a robot is? Who's definition would prevail? Put differently: can we ever determine what something is, if we are not that 'something' ourselves?

But there are more questions that could be dealt with by both mysticism and physics. Is a Siamese twin a being that has one or two soul personalities? Is travelling in time a fact, if reincarnation is a true phenomenon? Does the deep-freezing of the body influence the separation of body and soul-personality and can life return in the body after that has been defrosted? After how much time, and how, does that influence the thoughts on the cycles of reincarnation? Will abortion, euthanasia or the cloning of human beings take on a different aspect if we see the human body as the vehicle of a soul personality and therefore consider the body subordinate to the life principle for which it is such a vehicle? And these are only minor issues compared to the centuries-old questions whether we can master death, and can establish whether somebody has lived his life to the full. According to the present science the lifespan of any human being lies far beyond a hundred years. Nonetheless most of the mystic students will not reach that age. Yet nobody will state that they will then have been too briefly in harmony with the cosmic to embody the life of a true mystic. We have not enough knowledge to determine why somebody's life ends. So determining that somebody has died 'too soon' is something that we should not venture upon. Some people live their lives without doing any miraculous work in the world, and live a hundred years. Others change the world through their inventions, thoughts or deeds, and perhaps reach the age of thirty. How should we establish whether these people have lived to the full or have died prematurely, even whether they have or have not lived according to the highest mystical principles?

A few hundred years ago the average lifespan was much lower than today. From this alone it should be obvious that any claim at that time that a mystic of, say, forty years, was a true example of mysticism because he had become so old, would be false. Some people initiate and conclude tremendous, gigantic personal tasks of cosmic dimensions, seen their results, and they complete them in relatively few years. They have taken upon themselves a grand enterprise and seem to have lived to the full. To mystics the attempt to lengthen life beyond a reasonable scope is therefore futile. The person who wants to live longer should realize that he or she is a living organism, a vehicle for a lifegiving, vital energy. This personality has a task and will fulfil it. If it cannot be done in one lifespan, it will be done in a next one. From the very moment that we are born it is obvious that, although we are a living being, its physical part is constantly subject to change. This change apparently is part of our biological nature. It is demonstrably true that our way of living determines for a large part how our body will maintain itself during our limited lifespan. If we smoke or drink too much or do not eat well, or otherwise harm the biological sphere of our being, it will be detrimental to our lives, thus shortening the lifespan that otherwise we might have had. The key to a long life is partly in our hands if we follow the rules for a healthy living. But our actual lifespan seems to be of subsidiary importance for the fulfilment of a task in life.

There is a way to lead a relatively long life, namely according to the method that the esoteric schools have handed down to us over the centuries. If we lead a life that is mentally sound, with continuous attempts to be attuned to our inner self and to have a positive mind, it will have a profound effect on our physical body. This means, that if we are able to steer energy of a high potency through our bodies by means of concentrated mental effort, we are in direct contact with the best and most efficient source for a prolonged life.

98. Helping others

If we want to help somebody there is an urge that precedes a result. A generous motive is an important thing to have for a start. Practice alone can give it the right direction. Willingness to help puts us in the active part. Every day we may meet a person who needs help of some sort. When should we act? Every time when we meet such a person? This is difficult to answer. There is the well-known example of someone lying in the street, hit by a car. Should we think: 'Let him lie, it probably is his karma', or: 'He is in need of my help, and it is my karma that I am here at this time and place to help him'? The answer must come from within, and is determined by our view on humanity, on our own development, and on that of the other person. There may be lessons in it for us and the other one. When an event is at stake that needs no immediate attention, we shall perhaps find time for contemplating on our interference. It however often happens that an acute situation asks for our immediate response: do we help or not? Acting instinctively and yet being ready for the inner influx that may caution us, often takes place in a split second. This does not mean that we cannot reconsider our decision later. We are completely free to choose the way we want to help.

Giving help sometimes stems from the realization that we are all interconnected. It is as with the electric current going through a wire. When we attach lamps of different sizes at regular intervals to the wire, we will see that their individuality (size, colour) determines how much and which kind of light they give. What they have in common is the current that runs through the wire that connects them. They are interconnected. Some of the lamps already know; for other ones it is a new idea. When they are inquisitive they will learn about the current that goes through all the lamps, and get an idea of their relation with the others. This constitutes the brotherhood that they feel towards each other, because now they share basic principles, the patterns of nature. Only when the lamps let themselves be distracted by what the other lamps do, there seem to be differences - which are there, naturally. Because the paths of the individual lamps seem to diverge, whereas at the same time they notice that their interconnectedness is taught them, this could lead to the conclusion with the lamps that their viewpoint of oneness is wrong. But when everything is looked at in its context it is obvious that the one is true next to the other.

If we want to assist somebody, except in the situation of granting immediate help in case of an accident, we must know what frame of concepts he uses. Also when spiritual or mystical matters are involved. Otherwise the person whom we grant help would not understand us. Certain concepts might scare him off. Not through their contents, but through their form. If we have a conversation with an orthodox person, he may be open to a notion like 'heaven', but scared off should he hear the term 'the cosmic'. These words can indicate the same, but it takes a trained mind to see the likeness. To be able to see likenesses in things seemingly fragmented around us, we must have an open mind. On occasions the mind feels attacked by exterior viewpoints, because they form an attack on the comfortable balance of mind that originates from preconceptions. By letting go preconceptions room will be created for ideas. If one human being wants to help the other, both must be on the same wavelength. When they cannot, they can only with difficulty help each other.

If we want to use water to make a hole in a stone, we pour it drop by drop onto one spot for many centuries, instead of turning over tons and tons of water in one minute on the stone. Just as much must we take our time to get accustomed to somebody's pattern of thought. The other

person is then allowed to get used to the idea that somebody is prepared to exert himself for him. But we can only help if the ideas that are aimed at someone's mind are welcomed by it. In other words, there must be a kind of harmony from both sides. The help that we have in mind to give, will always in one form or the other have to be adapted to the way of thinking of the person who receives this help.

99. The battle between good and evil

In my opinion there is a major misunderstanding about the nature of good and evil in relation to the viewpoint that evil is the absence of good. Who of us would tell the mother who lost her child in the war that there is no evil, that it is only an illusion, that she need not worry because the war is only the absence of good? The absence of the one situation (the good) may indicate the active presence of its counterpart (the evil), and this evil can be extremely powerful and should not be underestimated. A neutral situation, in which nothing happens, will evoke the impression that good or bad is absent. If activity is visible somewhere, we realize that its counterpart must also exist. We are aware of such a counterpart or contrast when we see the elements that make up that contrast. For instance, if there would be a continuous awareness of light, there would be no awareness of a darker aspect, unless it would be possible to theorize about what we would see if there were no or less light.

In mysticism emphasis is laid on our ability to use our spiritual power to shape our lives and to work on the good side. It is a well-known theory that any abuse of such powers only harms ourselves and has no impact on others, unless those persons would know that they are the subject of negative thoughts and would give in to that awareness. This viewpoint is at the basis of the assumption that white magic works, and that black magic is powerless. Someone wrote: 'The discussion on evil and negative and positive always seems to be an interesting one with so many aspects. (...) If thought is a positive force just like physical action, and adheres to the law of cause and effect, wouldn't even harmful thoughts make some kind of impact in the positive universe?' I very much feel like endorsing to this thesis. The question is what this influence would look like. As we have seen, the thesis implies, that black magic is without effect in the sense that - as a boomerang - it only affects the one who practices it, and that there can be no influence on the intended victim if it does not cooperate. Possibly the energy issued by a negative mind may not be able to penetrate the aura of someone else through sheer mind-to-mind transfer, or to influence him in any other way. If someone through sending evil thoughts wants to force some other person to commit a crime, this may meet with the aura-barrier of the other person. But when issued in another manner, for instance orally or in writing, the negative force surely can affect the other person. For when the malevolent person through acts and words tries to influence the other person by appealing to his intellect and emotions, and by manipulating them, this may definitely often work. So negative forces can be transmitted or have a considerable effect.

Let us also dwell upon another question, which is: why do esoteric schools often seem to be the subject of attacks by negative forces? Some coming from the outside, and some unexpectedly from the inside of the esoteric schools. This is as old as the schools themselves. Is it true that the forces of light are always under attack by the forces of darkness, and if so, why is this so? Much of this will be revealed to us through a gradually continued mystical study and the perspective that originates from it. When a human being is attuned to and focussed on his deepest inner self, where there is light, then darkness will not be there. Why then are some forces willing to destroy or misinterpret him? Because it is inherent in the nature of everything that is not enlightened. For a malevolent person nothing is easier than to misinterpret, obstruct and attack that which he knows nothing about.

What should be the response of a mystical student when he is faced with attacks on his

principles, his efforts, even his esoteric school? Not uncommonly those attacks are evoked by the behaviour of individual students. The conduct of some members of an esoteric school may be far from what it propagates, and also far from the things that this school owes its big fame to. In all layers of society there are derailed people. It is not an item whether they are churchgoing or not, religious or not, nor is relevant to which political party or esoteric school they belong. It just happens everywhere. In the press coverage of crimes normally no attention is given to the religious or ideological background of the suspects. Only in exceptional cases - think of the stories about terrorists, the mafia and the Freemasons or a religious fight in one or other country - this connection is made. Every right-minded human however will recognize that a world-wide organization with a positive philosophy of life cannot be held accountable for the misconducts of an individual in that grouping. When we look at Christianity, we find that countless crimes are known of its followers, and although many of those crimes have even been committed in the name of the same Christianity, in the world the opinion is widely spread that Christianity - as a philosophy - is not guilty of this and does not propagate it.

We may wonder now, whether a mystical organization must fully distance itself from members that misbehave themselves. There is a case for it, but on the other hand the contrary is likewise desirable. As long as the misconducts in the personal lives of mystical students are not carried out in the name of their fraternal organization, it principally remains a personal affair of those members. Otherwise their fraternity has to act. Acting is then to the outside world a signal of the wish to uphold the high level of the integrity of the fraternity, rather than a token of fear of damage to its good reputation. This good reputation cannot be annulled by a few members who do not keep to the high principles of their fraternity. No one expects from the current religions and large philosophical movements that they cast out members who have made a faux pas in their private lives. On the contrary. In the prisons in the entire world prisoners are assisted by spiritual advisors from their own philosophy of life. They are not left to fend for themselves. Nobody in the world will interpret this spiritual help as being a declaration of approval with regard to the crimes committed. But, asked for their own opinion or that of their organization, the spiritual helpers should declare without restriction that in no way they endorse or support the crimes committed. If asked under similar circumstances, an esoteric school should answer the media that in no way such events take place under the auspices and consent of the school. The school should never support such actions, nor tolerate or encourage them, nor feign ignorance of them or stimulate them, but always regret them to a great extent.

Now does this mean that when someone tries to treat us badly or attack our ideals we should not resist? Being willfully deprived of an opposing force in ourselves when we encounter a destructive energy, may mean a considerable loss of our abilities and of our natural safeguards. Therefore it is a natural reaction to react when we are attacked. When some energy hits us, we want to respond to it, either consciously or unconsciously. Our attunement to our inner self rules about the type of response we have towards negative energy. The nature of our reaction is coloured by our experience with the mystical work. If we do not react, injustice will take over in many fields of life. At the same time an untimely interference from our part may cause injustice also. Both acting and nonacting can contribute to doing justice, or to combatting injustice. Determining what to do depends in any circumstance on the level of our attunement to our inner selves, for there the answer can be found to the question how to defend the things that we are proud of. In addition to attunement we also need humour and irony. When we manage to meet an attack with appeasable irony, it will just be as if the opposing force has already lost half of its

power. So already our attitude determines whether that which approaches us is an attack at all. The better our attunement, the less our ego will interfere. Of all possible reactions that we have as a response to some unwanted action directed towards us, the ego-based response is the most undesirable. But, the ego is not without meaning, so let us not throw away the baby with the bathwater. When we become aware of an energy that influences us, we will have to classify - using our mind and even our ego - whether this energy is benevolent or malicious. Do we think that we can allow entrance to the energy that envelops us, or do we come to the opposite conclusion? We must make a choice that is positive, and then further steps are going to follow yet. With making this choice we take into account the instrument with which we will fight the wrongdoing, namely inner strength and insight.

Some attacks may be very disturbing. Our inner peace may be under attack by nightmares, attacks from depression, feelings of abandonment or despair, and these events are 'negative'. We all know negative thoughts and tendencies. They may manifest themselves through such channels. They look isolated from our personality as a whole but they are not, like when we cover everything of a painting but a small patch that shows only unattractive splodges of paint. What is visible may look dark and gloomy, but when the cover is taken away it appears that the dark spot is a constituent part of a greater beauty. By nature any negative experience may be the beginning of a useful analysis as to what we think is really important in our lives. These experiences are not so much a test or trial, but form a natural pendant in our mind of the beauty that we endeavour to achieve. Good and its opposite are in the eye of the beholder. Both should be viewed together for a complete understanding.

100. Coming home

For many 'coming home' is inextricably connected with shelter. Warmth, the fire of the hearth, the company of those we love, give shape to a need for shelter - a necessity of life of the utmost importance. We find it on a spot that we call our 'home'. It is not by definition our parental home or our present home. Home is shaped through a condition or a place where the frequency of our person coincides - or harmonically is in sink - with what surrounds us. Even from our birth we seek shelter. It not only arises from the desire to protect our lives against attacks from the outside, but may also be the result of the trauma of having had to leave our mother's womb. Our first confrontation with life in the outside world has been one of being torn, of departure. We were on our way at once, as travellers in a world that cooled us off immediately. Being home is therefore associated with warmth, and leaving home with coldness. We do not wish to freeze; we want to be warm, be at home, in security.

As a matter of fact the whole day long we (physically and spiritually) commute between several forms of what we call 'home'. When we go to our daily work we are momentarily out. But what if this work consists of lecturing or exercising the fine arts, or when in some way or other it is extremely appealing to us? Maybe it is then that we come home in that work, this study, this hobby. As soon as we retract from the world and for instance go into meditation we enter a mystical home. But at the same time we have left our environment and that which normally we call our 'usual' home. When we leave our home to perform good activities somewhere else with kindred spirits who inspire us and have a positive influence on society we come home. And when we retract into meditation we are momentarily 'absent' and cannot be reached. Then we appear not to notice the outside world. Some people by the way do not feel at home when they perform positive work. They only thrive in crime or in war. Some find their feet there.

Harmony and our frequency may explain these apparent contradictions. We all have a certain basis tone or note, call it the frequency on which we function. That which is connected with it and does not provide a note of discord with it, belongs to it. Our system time and again tries to change or consolidate the circumstances in such a manner that we regain our balance or are confirmed in it, back to that which we really are or want to be. This harmony is relative and will not always be accompanied by similar perceptions. Nature strives for balance, but this balance is relative towards adjoining phenomena. Our acting may bring happiness or misfortune; it may be in harmony with what from the inside we attract to us like a magnet; and apart from that be or not be in harmony with our surroundings.

When we learn to depend on our inner self, we find there a source that offers us warmth along the way. So in fact we bring our home along, everywhere we go. We are at home everywhere. Warmth not only comes from our inner self. It also comes from our fellow human beings and our interaction with them, and from the love that we give and receive. Many people are restless, have not found their groove, and go out in the world. They leave what is their home to find somewhere else what they have missed. When they find it, to then it is their new home. It is not bound to a place. It is shaped by circumstances that link up with the calling that comes from inside. It is a state of mind.

He who finds rest in his inner self need not seek it elsewhere, for he finds it inside himself.

But also the restless traveller who leaves the country is looking for a place with which he feels in complete harmony, where he finds quiet. He also, answer the deep need that he perceives inwardly. The quiet and the restless person do not differ from each other that much. They seek that which is for them the shortest way to shelter, to that where they feel at home. The quiet human seeks it in his inner self. That seems to be the shortest way, one might think, for it seems that no goal can be nearer. But a spiritual traveller who goes this apparent short way often arrives at that goal obliquely. He runs in numerous pitfalls, is restless as well, sometimes is occupied with his study and exercises for tens of years and only finds quiet nearby, in his inner self. The restless person seeks it in a different continent: the longest way, but for him it may be the only road that is accessible for him and must be walked. Because it is the road that belongs to him.

Both travellers may be on their way for a very long time. When we come home it may be the place that we have abandoned, but also the place that we are heading to. It has to do with our fate. Therefore we should not attach a judgement to what we perceive in other people. Maybe we think they are restless. Maybe in our opinion they should stay closer at home with everything that they strive after. For we consider restlessness to be more of a negative trait than an instrument with which somebody has been equipped. We get restless when we see that somebody cannot find his niche. But are spiritual travellers not those *pur sang* who want to have a view as broad as possible, who are always on their way, and will not be deterred by any expedition?

101. The dual human being

According to some philosophies man is dual. This means that among other things he has a material body. When we speak about 'he has', then automatically with that a different part of the human being is indicated, that therefore is a nonmaterial body. With that it is the minimum pendant of the material body. In common parlance, in which somebody says: "I have a body", it seems to come to the fore that in fact everybody, be he a mystic or not, adherent of the duality theory or not, accepts that man consists of at least two aspects: the material body and the nonmaterial body. Because, something has said about itself that it has a body. And that which perceives its own body is immaterial. Now you may ask: "And what if somebody says: 'I have a soul personality', what part of the human being is then speaking?" It must still be the immaterial body, for that is the body that can reason.

Some mystical philosophies go one step further. They look at what a non material body is, and whether it is true that the material body and the nonmaterial body are the sole aspects of that human being. In other words, they look if there might be even more nonmaterial bodies. The nonmaterial body is then called the psychic body or the soul personality. It is the part of the human being that has individuality. Then there is the mental being. Thus we get a triade: a material body, a nonmaterial body being the psychic body, and a nonmaterial body being the mental body. The duality - a notion in which twofoldness appears literally - is therefore only dual to the extent that it renders the difference between anything about the body that is material, and that which (consequently open to further distinguishing) is nonmaterial.

Now suppose that we follow the point of view that man is only dual to the extent that he has a material body, and a nonmaterial body that equals a mental nonmaterial body. Then, in that point of view, there is no room for something like a psychic body, a soul personality. It then first of all strikes that it is not clear why an adherent of that theory has no difficulty in admitting that he has a mental body - therefore at least a nonmaterial body - and at the same time has difficulty in accepting that maybe a second nonmaterial body constitutes part of his whole being.

Can we perceive in our daily events around us what is true, the one or the other? I.e. whether we have only one nonmaterial body or perhaps even two nonmaterial bodies? Can we determine theoretically or practically whether man as we know him consists solely of a material body and a mental nonmaterial body? What would be the consequence when reality would be just like that? Could we determine where the false theory should be replaced by the correct one? When man has only one immaterial body, how then do we communicate with him? The consciousness works on the basis of the elements observation, interpretation, reflection and reaction. Can a singular immaterial body take care of all these elements?

Maybe you have noticed that people with psychic problems are able to talk about their own situation in a detached manner. I have seen this in dossiers that I work with a lot in my capacity of a civil servant. Somebody for instance says: "I will have to be in therapy for at least a year, for only then may I expect to be balanced again and to have progressed." Who in this human being discusses who? Obviously a human being has two kinds of immaterial bodies. The one immaterial body can observe the other one and pronounce upon it. The hierarchical difference between both immaterial bodies is clearly visible. The observing body

is dominant and is the intelligible observer, making comments about the other subjugated immaterial body.

This is very remarkable, especially because everybody is well familiar with this phenomenon, and yet in many circles it is ruled out that man has one or more immaterial bodies. I presume that the resistance against this conclusion has to do with the fact that in many other circles (religions, mystical organizations) the theory about the existence of immaterial bodies at the same time brought with it a philosophy about its endlessness. Through that the point of view regarding immaterial bodies has become interconnected with thoughts about reincarnation, karma and eternity, which caused many groups of thinkers to separate, without them having paid attention to the similarity in their theories, whilst they might have found each other on the basic ideas.

102. Dreaming

For us reality is - among other things - that which we perceive with our five physical senses. There are also other - immaterial - senses. There is a reality that we do not exclusively know with our physical senses. We all have feelings and emotions, we think about matters, we dream; in short, half our lives are filled with perceptions that have no bearing with the physical senses. In the dreamworld the five immaterial senses seem to be able to come together in one setting. We experience all things in a very lifelike way, and all that in a non material world. This reality is so real that we are only aware of that world at that moment. We are embedded in it just as real as when we have our eyes wide open perceiving with a state of wakefulness in the normal world. After awakening we sometimes say: "Alas (or: fortunately), it was just a dream." As it suits us we desire the dreamworld to become true, or we are relieved that it has not become reality. But in the dream at that moment we were in just that world, it was reality. The conclusion must be, that dreams are part of our karma, for we are in the centre of both worlds and they influence us.

Where do our dreams originate? Not always from the things we experienced subconsciously and then buried deeply. Some elements are totally new. Maybe we walk around in a strange, non existing town. It may be that we see a building there in detail. What we see, is then completely new to us and moreover a constant. When the building consists of thousands and thousands of bricks and numberless differing bay windows which are all processed in a unique pattern, we can avert our glance from them and give them our attention again, and all those stones are in exactly the same place. Then such a building is not just a concoction that previously has been constructed in our mind with difficulty and then has been memorized. It has a cause outside our subconscious reality, outside our memory. Behind the images is a cause that we cannot influence and does not emerge from ourselves, even if the elements in them are familiar to us and maybe partly have been generated through our subconsciousness. First and foremost we are their channel - the catalyst.

In our dreams human beings are present, with whom we can be in a conversation. What kind of beings are they? Are they what some call the 'elementals'? Twodimensional beings who function at a certain cosmic plane? Yet they are sometimes familiar persons, relatives or friends, not seldomly distorted in a strange manner, and they reveal a self-awareness. At what level then do they function. It may be that in the dream we get into a dialogue with them. It may even be so that misunderstandings develop that we consequently point out to each other, in such a manner that we in no way could have made up those conceptions - like when in a stage scenario (or could have brought them to the surface from our own memory). In a dream I have experienced something like the following. I made a remark and somebody answered. A third party present told my interlocutor that he probably misunderstood me, and he explained why. I endorsed that. Then my interlocutor gave a new reply, from which I consequently indicated that I understood his line of reasoning. Again the third person intervened, and then it came to the fore that the two of us had misunderstood him. When I woke up I was very much captured by this. Something very enigmatic did come about here. What intelligences were at work here? How could I get entangled in a dream with which others undeceived me, in such a manner that I myself could in no way have written the screenplay of the dream? The elements of this dream could impossibly derive from my subconsciousness, at the very most from a layer close to what we describe with the Akasha Chronicles. Most dreams develop

without us exercising any influence on them, as if a movie is played before our consciousness. We do not always compose them from elements that were already present in our subconsciousness.

103. Happiness

There is a question that keeps us all busy and it is: why are we on earth? I do not want to come with the set catechism reply, but maybe it can be circumscribed as follows: We are on earth to be happy. Happiness is the feeling of profound fulfilment.

But what is it made of? Is it composed of one thing? Or is it about an addition sum? Some people put everything in life on one horse and during the main part of their lives are occupied with gaining one thing, that apparently will bring the happiness that they pursue with full ardor. But what happens when this one thing is unattainable, or it is taken away from them as soon as they have attained it? Then their world may collapse! Suppose we want to obtain the majority of shares in a big company and have all our attention focussed on that. Suppose we succeed, what happens then if the company suddenly goes bankrupt and we are left empty-handed? Do we then still have a basis to be happy? With seeking happiness had we not better go in for risk spreading - to stick to share related terms? For with happiness it is just as with the small print with the investment trusts: "Results gained in the past need not be a guarantee for the future."

I think that each of you has come to the conclusion that happiness is not a static point in life, just as easily to be reached as a mountain top. It rather seems to be composed of many elements. Being psychically enlightened is one of those elements. Or being healthy. Or having shelter, food and clothing. In this list of elements could there be a rank-order? For some people the mystical striving after enlightenment is the most important thing. But for the masses this is not the loftiest goal. Most people find other things more important. When we think about important things we also assume that important things make us happy. But this need not be the case at all. When you have fallen in the street and get a tetanus injection it is important, but it does not bring you happiness in the sense that we connect to it normally. But if you do not get the injection you may become unhappy. If you have nothing to eat you may become very unhappy. But if you do have food it need not bring you happiness. You will just feel neutral: your hunger has been alleviated, you do not even give it a thought. When you are ill you may feel unhappy. But as soon as you feel better again, everything is back to its normal course and you do not notice that you are healthy. You feel healthy but this in itself does not make you happy. In a word, something that is important to us (food, health, relations) does not necessarily for that reason make us happy, though it just might.

When you win the lottery and at the same time are in coma in the hospital for a long period of time, you are not aware of your new attainments, which potentially might make you happy. Some day you recover from the coma and get familiar with your new richness. Maybe you will be happy in an instant although nothing altered the situation for a long time. You just had no knowledge of it. Some months later you are quite busy with shoving in your equities portfolio to prevent all your assets from getting lost or vaporizing through a recession in the economy. Whilst outside the birds are singing, and nature is beautiful and everybody enjoys the nice weather you are troubling yourself with the choices that you must make: buy or sell. So much for your happiness.

Sometimes you hear people say: "I am entitled to happiness." Then you ask yourself what do they mean by that? For there is no such thing as a law of happiness that determines that everybody must be happy. Of course everybody strives after happiness and in fact all our

earthly life is aimed at just that, but there is no such thing as being entitled to happiness. Happiness is not something that has been adopted in the House of Commons as a bill of law, and of which consequently it has been established that it encompasses a land law for every citizen. It is partly granted us on the basis of laws of nature that we do not yet fathom very well, and partly through what we have accomplished ourselves. So there is no such thing as a legal title for happiness, for that would mean that it should be bestowed upon us because we are human beings, regardless whether we arrange our lives in such a manner that happiness is attracted through our deeds and frame of mind. With that this 'claim on happiness' becomes something incompatible with the laws of nature. Cause and effect are the factors that determine whether happiness will be ours. And also remember that when you claim happiness as a right, and someday it will have come about in the manner that you had in mind, it might turn out to become a punishment. 'When the gods want to punish somebody they grant them their prayers', is the beautiful saying.

Do we always know when we are happy? When we ask somebody whether he would call himself a happy human being he is going to reflect upon this. He then sums up a number of things. Obviously with some things that make us happy we have to consciously dwell upon them to be still able to notice their presence. For instance when we have nice friends and relatives, a nice job, or when we are healthy, we are often so accustomed to it that we no longer notice it. For they are permanently present. Then we must instil on ourselves what we have, and this awareness summons feelings of happiness only at that moment. There are also beatific things that are incidental. Take the situation that you are enjoying the sun, sitting on a terrace with somebody in town. Then we say to each other how cosy it is and that we feel happy. We need not delve in our memory to get clear that it is a situation that makes us happy. No, we are instantly aware of it. Happiness often gets out of scope. We are not saying to each other all day how happy we are with our friends, our health, our job, et cetera. We get complacent through long-term happiness.

It is undeniably true that although most people strive after happiness, only a handful strive after enlightenment. Maybe because they assume that they are diverging roads: the one leads to happiness and the other to enlightenment. If you have one, you will miss the other, is what they think. But the truth is that achieving enlightenment is a shape in which happiness presents itself. If happiness is the realization of accomplishment, of profound harmony, actually everything will fit in this. Then somebody may feel deeply happy without possessing a penny. Or he may be happy when the sun shines, of when someone is kind to him, but also when it rains. Or when he is capable of being kind to someone else himself, or of having moulded his character. And for some, indeed, happiness equals working on the development of their personality.

Happiness can only emerge when all the circumstances cooperate. When you have just heard that a near relative is incurably ill you are no longer interested in winning the lottery. Obviously the things that make us happy must come to us at the right moment, and then there must be no jamming stations. Otherwise the feelings of happiness will not surface. The story goes that a man wandered about in the desert, languishing for water. In the distance he saw laying a leather pouch. He crawled towards it with his last strength and with difficulty opened the pouch. When he managed to do so and could inspect the contents he sighed: "Oh, these are only diamonds." So he did not think in an elated disposition: "Hurray, I am immensely rich, now I only have to find a way to get out of the desert in one piece!" His talismanical diamond treasure tarnished

through the worries that he had. Such is the relative nature of things.

What should you do when you are happy? You need not keep it to yourself. You can also do something with it for your fellow human beings. Of course it is wonderful when you can share happiness with other people. You must pass it on and then it is expressed in your aura. People for good reason say that someone 'beams with happiness'. It works like a magnet, for the whole environment of such a person revives through it. And to us as onlookers it is contagious. Such a person does not keep his happiness to himself, he radiates it, in fact he passes it on to someone else. And at the same time he does not lose it himself. For such a source is inexhaustible. Happiness itself cannot really be given away. There are people who want to abstain from everything. And they feel happy through that. It resembles detachment a bit. There are moments that we feel affected that we have given something away. This can hardly be called detachment. At other moments we give away something without feeling a loss through it. This resembles detachment more closely. But maybe detachment goes a bit further than that, to wit that we are hardly concerned at all about receiving or giving away something. Through the vacuum of detachment desired qualities get room to manifest themselves. For some people it is the summit of what can be achieved. But when we tip the scales with it, it will be close to indifference. It is quite all right that we feel happy when giving away something. Or that we possess something ourselves and enjoy it. So the question is whether the path of detachment is such a good choice for everyone. Maybe you can handle detachment properly and maybe for you it does mean distancing yourself rather than abandoning something. Being detached is a mystical way of life, certainly, but whether it is the right path for you is something that you can best judge for yourself.

Our needs change, and maybe they are supplemented with desires of a higher order. It may also be that we postpone them indefinitely. The three mystical principles which enable the moving ahead to the target, are meditation, contemplation and concentration. Meditation to settle down the mind and to become inspired and receive an impulse to the right desire. The details of the received impressions are weighed by contemplation and looked at from all sides. Concentration follows to turn the desired things into reality. Finally the abandonment follows, the being detached, the being receptive. The yearning for peace, for elevation of the human mind, for the improving of social circumstances and for the full use of our abilities, is the search for happiness. Happiness is an aspect of something. It does not exist on its own. Happiness is also a purpose, for by striving after it we try to make contact with our origin.

What do others say about happiness? St Augustin says: "Is not the happy life the life that everybody wants and that absolutely nobody does not want? Where have they learned about it that they want it so much? Where have they seen it that they have learned to love it so much? And he continues: "The happy life is not seen with the eyes, because it is not a material thing." (Confessions, Ch. 10, XX-29/30). Obviously we seek happiness through a means that is material or immaterial, the purpose of which is an immaterial condition, a state of mind. For the feeling that we are happy is of a mental, immaterial shape.

Now how does happiness get to us? Does it come natural to us or must we do something for it. Some forms of happiness are more or less the result of a conscious exercise of the will. He who feels happy when his garden is in order will do everything to spud out the weeds and put new plants in the soil - through his exercise of the will. But there is also a kind of longing for

happiness that is much less a matter of will, but seems to sprout forth from a much deeper layer in ourselves. This goes somewhat further than what we put on a shoplist to take to the garden centre. Plato considers the search for happiness as the rough outline of a desire of our innermost being for its origin. He says: "Obviously the soul (...) wants something else, which it cannot utter; it has a strange presumption of what it wants and guesses." (Symposium, 16.) A beautiful statement, for most often we do not even know what we want. We just want to change from a situation of discomfort in a situation that gives us a feeling of happiness. To speak with Plato: We do not know what we want; we are only guessing. Happiness is a sensation that takes place in the mind. Reflection on our own circumstances determines whether we are happy or unhappy. Most of us have ideals the fulfilment of which means happiness. Our needs change with that and maybe they are replenished by desires of a higher nature.

The happiness that falls to our lot belongs to our personal achievements, inalienable qualities and baggage. It is a dynamic element of our personality, and this element seems to be everywhere and nowhere. We long to transmute the imperfect into the perfect. We try to achieve this by drawing something towards us and adding it to ourselves. In stead of that we can also try to change something, in ourselves, and to develop ourselves. Happiness is a sensation that takes place in the mind. Reflection determines whether we are happy or unhappy. Happiness depends less on inner and outer circumstances, for they can both have a favourable or unfavourable effect.

From the difference in perception of what happiness is ensues the danger of intolerance. We count ourselves as the ones to whom everything must be judged, who are the measurement of justice, truth and love. Also of happiness. And for our striving after happiness much must yield. But our opinion about what can make us happy, changes every moment. Our ideals too change time and again. Now we find our happiness here, now we find it there. Our disposition determines to a large extent whether we feel happy.

Happiness will not always come to us in a straightforward manner. Our whole life is filled with things that we do not strife after directly and which are the side effects of the few things that we did strive after. In those side effects may lie happiness. Suppose that one of the main aims that you have put yourself in life is the acquiring of knowledge. Actually acquiring it may bring happiness. But there is also the path towards it with all its side effects. Through following a course you will have met other personalities who close up with you. Maybe you have found friends for life. You enjoy the moments that you are together with them and change thoughts with them. Maybe you find yourself in the board and have discovered that you have executive qualities or are creative. This is what brings happiness.

I am convinced: we mainly create our own happiness. Boeddha said:

"If the thoughts are only aimed
on that which is right,
happiness must follow of necessity."

104. Structure

Recently I heard on television that one still has not succeeded in unravelling the manner in which ants make clear to each other what tasks must be performed. One knows that certain kinds of animals and even plants exchange gasses to signal each other or to point at dangers. But the ins and outs of the manner in which ants, in their apparent unstructured swarming come to an exchange of information, is still an enigma. I wonder if this will not always remain the case. Perhaps you know the movie *Koyaanisqatsi* of Godfrey Reggio, interwoven with the music of Philip Glass. Reggio has run all kinds of situations on earth in a sped up pace, or recorded them with a camera setting with which pictures are taken with intervals. Run in a normal pace flowers open oneself up in a few seconds, the clouds run across the heavens, the sun hurries through the heaven firmament, and the people resemble the same writhing mass of ants that I just spoke about. He who sees the crowd in a town hurrying chaotically, unintentionally gets the feeling that it is just as incomprehensible in its motives as the ants. Thus on a construction site or a shipyard you see people pelt from the left to the right, rushing to-and-fro and vice versa, during which they move things, take things up or discard them, and seem to undertake a meaningless quest into nothingness. And whilst this takes place a foundation is laid before your eyes, rafters of ships are erected, and from this completely incomprehensible chaos a ship seems to come into existence.

There are many parallels with the world of the ants. From observing the ants man draws many conclusions. For instance that complete chaos rules, that no command structure is visible, and that it seems that a goal can be achieved yet. As to how far does this differ from the shipyard in our example? There as well, everything seems to refuse a command structure. There as well, it appears that a goal can be achieved from the undecipherable dissimilarity in shape. What does this teach us?

We ourselves - as the observers of the shipyard and its swarming in it - are familiar with all the information that is needed to find the answers. For we know that there certainly is a command structure. First of all there was a principal, who in his mind has made a conception. Next this conception has crystallized out, for at the moment that he went to inform others of his thoughts or put them on paper in a preliminary design, this was a fact. In the next step this principal with many employers has come to an elaboration of his plans. In this command structure not only orders were given, but there has been an exchange of thoughts and opinions, the one of which has been accepted, and the other was discarded. There was an interaction between minds, and in it the dialectic process, with which the one outcome together with yet another outcome leads again to a new starting point, became visible. The command structure knows many layers. Because after the principal has come to unanimity with his own people, he brings in a ship-builder. There the whole process of consulting, weighing, deciding, modifying repeats itself. Then the process become more concrete, for the builder is going to order his materials. So at the shipyard after some time it bristles with principals, contractors, subcontractors, and commands are given ad hoc from both sides. This may vary from an order at a high level to continue part of the constructing on the basis of new drawings, to the yell of a chauffeur, who calls to his mate that he must lift a bunch of iron more to the left. Only if we take all this into consideration and then see the teeming crowd on the wharf, we can put things in perspective. Then we see that the chaos does have a structure.

Or maybe it is even different. When seeing those pictures who would not wonder if all those people with all their tasks just could not walk through the picture a bit more straightforward? For instance you see a little figure shifting from the left to the right and then back again, or into an entirely different direction, or perform an oscillatory motion, without this seemingly having a contribution to the building process. Perhaps he was just thinking, or rolling a cigarette, whilst in his mind the opportunities to go about his daily task in this or that manner unfolded themselves. Or maybe his colleague had momentarily gone away to pick up something important for him, and he was obliged to kill his time for a moment. But if we do not know that, we would think that all tasks could be performed much better when this person would move to the work component in a straight line, instead of via a roundabout way or hesitatingly. We would in fact mean that all processes could be better performed when all actions would run across a straight line, and no curve could be perceived in the crowd. In the same manner as we would expect that when the ants would tow a little branch or a dead animal towards their formicary, they ought to do this totally in line. Why does it not happen? With people it is because the functionality of their moving does not prescribe that they move in a straight line. A human being must have fun in his job, and this is also obtained by walking to and fro every now and then and stretching one's legs. So there is functionality, because when somebody feels well, he will better perform his duties. And a thousand and one reasons can be thought of why people in such a situation do not move in a rigid, straight line and also why this rigid line is not necessarily the most effective one to do the job.

Now that we know that a certain degree of chaos is inevitable or even necessary we could just as well come to the conclusion that the perceived chaos is not or only partly a chaos. Then the question comes up whether such a rationalization of our apparent unstructured acting can also be projected on the ants with their activities. Man tries to understand the acting of the ants from his perspective. Because they obviously do something, for instance replenishing their stocks, we expect that they work on this goal as efficiently as possible. By showing a nonchaotic behaviour that is. Strange, for on the basis of what law must a purpose be realized in a manner that is as efficient as possible, and why do we not consider that even our own chaotic behaviour may have an acceptable reason, and that efficient behaviour often only serves an economic purpose (saving of money or time)? It has no inherent higher value. At any rate we seem to take it for granted that when the ants in their work would not walk about as they do, but along straight lines, it would be more easy for us to unravel their command structure. That we would find that - now that finally there is no longer a chaotic outer demonstration of moving - we could the quicker derive the law from the acting. But beside the fact that we assume that the chaos keeps us from recognizing the underlying structures and exchanges of information, there is more that makes it difficult for us to sound the behaviour of the ants.

As we have said, we project our way of working on that of the ants without being consistent. We are of the opinion that the ants must have a command structure that can be derived from behaviour and this is what we are constantly looking for. So we forget, that even from the chaotic behaviour of humans it cannot be deducted what the underlying laws are. It would never enter anybody's head to reduce their command structure on the basis of a movie about the mass of moving little figures on the shipyard. And yet we try to do just that with regard to the mass of ants. It is sometimes said that the higher has an overall view of the lower and not vice versa. And also that man with his 'higher' consciousness must be able to fathom the

'lower' consciousness, mainly on the basis of projection. This is an assumption that biology has abandoned of late. Humans do not by definition act on a higher level than plants or animals. But because we are inclined to stick to the old world view we still project our own lives on those of the ants and try to reduce their command structures from their behaviour, and to understand how they are. This is unjust, not only because we cannot even ourselves directly reduce the natural laws from our own behaviour, but also because we take it for granted that we - as humans - must always be able to understand the 'other' (i.e. the lower). Strangely enough however projection might be successful, if we would depart from the oneness of all beings, but as we have seen we project from an assumption that at the same time is correct and incorrect. Now suppose that in the cosmos there are beings with a consciousness that supersedes that of ours by far. Departing from our own behaviour we would even project their points of view regarding our behaviour, and now upwards. We would have those angelic beings point to humanity whilst they would ask each other: "What in heaven's name are they doing down there? There is neither rhyme nor reason to it."

What would be the state of affairs if finally we would find out that a complex frame of exchanges of chemicals and gasses would mutually urge the ants to certain behaviour? What would we have gained by it? Even someone who would be able to trace back our own behaviour on the shipyard to the command structures on the architectural firm and to the suppliers would not grasp what it is to think about something in such a building project, to differ from opinion, to ponder, to study solutions and reject them again, to hope for results, to go by intuition, to be disheartened now and then when a desired result fails to occur, to enjoy the comradeship during work, to be tired at the end of the working day, to be satisfied with any step forward. How could the mapping of chemical reactions make us wiser? Maybe from all the working phases even a mathematical action model might be constructed, but what does that tell us about notions like aims, motivation, pleasure in working, being astonished about our own abilities?

Every search for the truth and every quest for the laws behind the things is the result of our innate curiosity. The quest itself may be of importance and bring joy, almost become a purpose in itself. There is nothing left for us but deep admiration and awe for that which in nature ultimately never can be disclosed to the full and always will raise new questions.

105. Intelligent design

There is much ado about intelligent design. But, what is intelligence? Can it be linked to something not personified? By definition it cannot. We as humanity just about left the time behind us in which we personified the forces of nature. With the thunder belonged a thunder god, with lightning a lightning god, et cetera. Through pharaoh Ichnaton western civilization was made acquainted with the thought of monotheism. So in fact he made the first step towards a unification theory of religion. The next step was replacing a religious point of view by a humanistic one. And now we are setting the clock back by projecting all kinds of aspects that relate to the human consciousness on the unknown forces in nature - although not anew on a godlike figure. Then the former projection was more logic! What is wrong with the theory of the 'intelligent design' is, that it encompasses a personification. For intelligence is not an autonomous phenomenon, it is a function. It is attached to something or someone who can be intelligent. Although it is quite an achievement to find a commonly accepted definition of intelligence on our earthly level, it is mainly a fact that intelligence is the ability to learn and adequately apply possibilities. This supposes an entity that can distinguish between a and b, that can make choices, this is, weighing which option deserves preference above another one. This entity must find solutions for questions or problems that have arisen outside that entity. The entity observes, interprets and reflects. This seems suspiciously akin to the working method of the human brain, and how can one imbue this with a power that transcends man? Now this can only be realized by personifying this power. But then there is no longer much of a difference between the theory of the intelligent design and the Creation narratives from the religions. So nobody is really waiting for this intelligent design theory. Now what about the selection processes that take place in nature. We can only say about them that they take place. It is the way the brain interprets it.

We are like the human being of Plato who is tied up in a cave and only can read out reality by its shadows. Suppose that we would sit in that cave and every day about this time of the year would hear the birds singing at about 4 o'clock in the morning. If we would well map other phenomena that take place about that time period (it is becoming lighter, there is an increasing noise), we would after many years succeed to establish correlations, to make predictions. But we would not have the slightest idea of what a bird is, let alone what its place is in the rank of things. The physicists are now looking for a theory or formula that unites the most important forces of nature. And this whilst on this world there are about five billion people who already have such a theory. Just ask them. They do this from their religion (image of God) or from their atheism (image of the world), from humanism and mysticism. Intelligent design is a contradiction departing from the role that we attribute to it. According to some there is a God and according to some there is not. And now we try with all our strength to create a hybrid with which everybody is satisfied. But why must we be satisfied at all? Because man wants to understand everything that he does not understand, at all costs. The knowledge about nature, which we acquire through (exact) study or through meditation is always a derivative from reality, coloured and interpreted by us. That activity is the real 'intelligent design'. The weak nuclear force of the theory of the 'intelligent design' is, that it wants to attribute an intelligence to 'something'. With that, this 'something' may on the one hand not be called 'God', but on the other hand requires of necessity a personification. But then what is the difference with the creational theory? Only the definition of the word 'God'.

106. Rhetoric

In how far is rhetoric of importance in a reasoning, and can we - when debating with each other, distinguish between arguments concerning content, and rhetoric? Or, in a broader perspective, between content and shape? And, if we can, what does that mean and which results can we link to a conclusion?

What is rhetoric? According to a dictionary it is "hot air", in the sense of "pomposity, elocution, grandiloquence." This does not make our point of departure easier, for with the first part of the definition, to wit 'hot air', the dictionary seems to have set the tone in such a way that we would instantly reject rhetoric. For a change of mind must have a subject and we need pomposity like we need a hole in the head. The terms bombast, lyrical quality and pathos can be disposed of as undesired. But with 'pathos' it is - also according to the same dictionary - either about bombast, or "that which is touching, and inspiration." And this is of the utmost importance in an exchange of ideas. For it is all about making points of view known to each other. That which is touching and inspiration may play a considerable part with this, so rhetoric is not only related to linguistic usage. Even the way language is used (accompanied by gestures, et cetera) may be counted as rhetoric. Now what is the role of 'that which is touching' and 'inspiration'? The touching things are those that touch a sensitive chord in someone's heart. An appeal to his sentiment is made, not only literally through the words of the speaker, but also by a kind of carrier wave that accompanies the words, and not only appeals to him intellectually but also from the inside. Maybe even exclusively from the inside. Inspiration is closely related to this. Someone who speaks with inspiration can also with that touch the heart of the other person. Thus it becomes visible what the value is of the thought and its shape.

A thought may consist of its own, but if we want to share it with somebody else and therefore want to express the thought, this condition has passed. The point of view is then carried by words, deeds, nonverbal expression, intonation, suggestions. It may be so that a thought cannot be dissociated from the shape in which it is uttered, but this is not to say that the shape is subordinate to that thought. Is it an indissoluble twofoldness, and are they in this sense equal elements, or can a hierarchy be perceived in them or attached to them? It depends on the value that we want to attribute to each of the assembling elements.

We may ascertain that the value of an exchange of ideas is determined by its purpose, by the means used to come to that exchange of ideas, and by the dosage of those means. If we want to share a thought with someone the message must get through. We can implement several means for this. This is not capricious for we can adjust this to the persons with whom we have a discussion. For our aim is to communicate something, be it a (unselfish) point of view that may be beneficial to the other person, be it the wish to reach a consensus, or the eliciting of a stiff debate. This requires a choice of the means. Individually we will be more accessible for the one or the other means. The means to convey the thought is therefore determined by the aim (and as an extension of it the target group). It may consist of anything: gestures, mimic, intonation. In certain countries it is customary to accompany a point of view with many gestures. There the gesture might get worn out. For if everybody speaks with gestures, how much more expressiveness with gestures could one add to a thought? But in our own country, where we are not accustomed to manual communication, the conveying of

conceptions with the simultaneously making of emphasizing gestures could have an effect that in another culture might no longer occur. Also the tone of the conveying of the thought is important. He who addresses a group of children will adapt his tone of voice, and convey the message in quite a different manner than when speaking about the same subject for adults. Moreover the dosage is important, but much less depending on the age of the audience. It is more related to the purpose behind the exchange of ideas. We can convey conceptions with a minimum of means. This is visible in a guided meditation, where those present have their eyes closed and where the light in the room is moderated. Then almost nothing will distract the participants from the message conveyed. Then there will be an unspoken consensus to adapt - with as less distraction or a great show of words as possible - the directions of the one leading the meditation. All this does not mean that it makes a message more authentic. This by the way is something for a separate article. Apparently we should have to listen with our eyes closed to have a message affect us unbiased, and be guarded against someone's expression. But even then we have only excluded a small part of the senses. Can we exclude more senses? This is going to be difficult, for if someone wants to explain something to us, we cannot no longer follow it with our eyes and ears closed.

Aforesaid we have seen that an exchange of ideas requires a choice of certain means. One of them is, as we have seen, speech. The other means of communication are supplementary to that. Speech can be subdivided for we can convey a thought through a serious or humoristic choice of words, through blend in hesitations, through speaking with emphasis, et cetera. If we would place rhetoric at one end of the spectre, an entirely monotone rendering of a thought would be at the other end. Emotionally we may feel uneasy with the applying of rhetoric, because it always has a bit of a negative connotation. In the sense that 'when you run short of arguments you can always back up your point of view with rhetoric'. This has not much to do with its dosage by the way. For instance a speech can be accompanied with the application of a lot of drama, suggestive questioning and so forth, and this rhetoric can have the effect that the speaker aims at. But also the inserting of significant speech silents (even so, that - to quote the Dutch writer Godfried Bomans - the audience is almost on the verge of yelling for mercy), or the uttering of some meaningful loose words, may be very definite for the impression that the audience undergoes. Rhetoric has an influence that comes into existence more through the phenomenon of rhetoric itself than through its dosage. There is a rhetoric that is very modest and mainly verbal. And there is the form that on the contrary is not modest at all but theatrical, dramatic and all but apocalyptic. There is a rhetoric that is applied by the speaker to veil false or badly founded arguments. In that case it is the extension piece of an unjustifiable manipulation. And there is rhetoric that is purely applied as a stylistic device, with which the speaker thinks it all right for the audience to recognize and appreciate the rhetoric as such for the sake of the inherent value to be found in it. In that case the contents of the message may be revealed explicitly.

What does rhetoric do with us and why is it needed? Observing or listening to somebody who brings his story in a rhetorical manner has an emotional impact on us. It has something thrilling, even sometimes frightening. When an orator looks at us piercingly, hushes up, puts rhetorical questions, then an expectant, sometimes tense atmosphere comes into existence. From sentence to sentence you are waiting for what the speaker has up his sleeve. Indeed this has something which, as Bomans has very clearly seen, urges towards calling for mercy. We hang upon the speaker's lips, but at the same time wish him to at last deliver us from the

energetic chains that he has put us in. There is something in it of shrinking, of an electrical sparkle that we feel run across our spine. The speaker is, literally, a 'captive' speaker. He has us under his spell, he leads us into vistas the existence of which was unknown to us. He puts a spell on us, purely with sound, glance, gesture. Where is this deep power that is the hallmark of rhetoric? It seems just as difficult to answer as the question why music has a special effect on us. There appears to be impulses that touch us as a wand and call us emotionally. No wonder then that when we are presented an idea that has been clothed in a lot of rhetoric, we will be less on our guard intellectually. Therefore, for a speaker (who in fact is a manipulator) rhetoric from way back is an excellent means to win his public over to his side. Rhetoric, consisting of a multitude of means, of which the gesture is just one. When we compare a rhetorician with a nonrhetorician we may become conscious of what it is in rhetoric that carries us away so much. When somebody is compelled to depict a rhetorician, he may use word and gesture. Mainly gestures with which the arms are uplifted to heaven, widely spread, and the eyes are also raised to heaven. This may be an expression of despair but also of ecstasy. I see it as the key why rhetoric makes us fall under its spell. Did you ever notice that many depictions of enlightened persons show exactly this shape, with arms raised, the eyes lifted to heaven? It looks as if they want to embrace heaven. Through this the image appears of a magnitude that they want to grasp to get it adopted in all earthly things. It are gestures only expected from an adult, not from a child. But there as well a key to the question can be found. The exalted person, brought to ecstasy, with spread out arms, is the mirror image of the unborn child. It is in a foetal bearing, with which all bodyparts are closely squeezed together, and the child seems to occupy the ideal spherical shape. At birth it leaves this shape. It stretches out itself, waving with its little arms, expansion at last, deliverance at last. This is accompanied by an emotional shock. The child starts to cry. Despair, because it had to leave a safe place, which was both heavenly and earthly. Ecstasy at the same time, because a new journey is undertaken. It is short of speech at that moment, but should the child be able to speak right after birth and make an account of the heavenly realm that it has just left, it would be the rhetorician in optima forma. When a speaker impassionates us something changes in our consciousness. Together with him we want to rise to higher things, to the ideal level that he depicts. We want to free ourselves, inhale deeply, spread our arms and exclaim together with him: "Yes, this is exactly how it is!"

107. Protection

It is in no way true that a mystic cannot be subject to accidents. When he begins to climb the mystical path the student sometimes thinks that his status of a student guards him against all earthly discomforts and that the path offers him a special protection. This point of view cannot only cause unnecessary damage, but also works stagnating. For we must not forget that mystical development means a better mastering of the natural laws and not a negation of them. A fundamental mystical principle is that thoughts and deeds form a main cause of what befalls us in life. When our radiation is harmonic and positive we can cope with much in life. When in our lives we do not react in harmony with the natural laws then this causes a reaction that eventually works against us.

Some amongst us may suspect that mystical striving fends the whims of fortune off of them. To find out in how far this is correct we must map how we as mystical students enter our new field of study. In the beginning we know little of the energies that surround us. The result of this is that regularly we clash with the forces that want to push us in the right direction. If we do not open our mind we choose the opposite direction, which may make us go a wrong path. It is easy to avoid an obviously negative path, for we recognize it as such. On the other hand an apparent positive path may have a negative aspect that we overlook. When our consciousness is well attuned we can distinguish which path is acceptable. In the beginning we do not know this yet. Through that we make the wrong choices repeatedly, with all its consequences. We make certain decisions by calculating things, but often we have a subconscious way of thinking that sends us into a certain direction. For the rest it depends on coincidence where we end up.

Mysticism tries to make us more amenable to the positive by teaching us how we can better attune to our inner voice. Through that we learn to distinguish which situations there are, through which forces they are directed, and how we can adapt ourselves in a flexible manner to them. This strongly influences the protection that we think we receive. Let us take as an example that we expect to be able to cross the street with our eyes closed because we as students will be free from being injured. It is absolutely true that the study of mystical principles offers protection, but not against everything, and certainly not against the result of crossing the street with our eyes closed. Mystical study also offers dangers, for instance vanity and overestimation of oneself. As students we learn to withstand the forces that try to thwart the development of the human race or that are otherwise aimed at destruction. But nobody can protect us against self delusion. Our biggest adversary is our own objective consciousness. It can badger us during our whole life. This is the reason why we in vain make an appeal to assistance when crossing the street with our eyes closed. A traffic situation has its own laws. It is fatal to mix up the results of two laws of nature. If you do not want to fall of stairs you must never again climb one. If you never want to be caught up in a car accident you must never again drive a car, et cetera. Everything has its own natural laws, and with everything we do we must be prepared to put up with them.

As mystical students we are indeed protected through applying in the right manner the mystical laws and the forces that accompany it. As students we can be attacked from the inside or the outside. From the inside and the outside we are sometimes taken under protection. Conversely we can try to protect others. But when we cross the street with our

eyes closed with the assumption that the cosmic laws will safeguard us from an accident, we forget that our action may lead to an accident as the result of a very understandable, natural law. Then we have not recognized an important mystical law, and mixed up inner protection with outer protection, which in this case we control ourselves. We do not understand that we are in the position to create paradise on earth, and think that a 'kiss of life' from on high will arrange everything for us.

We just mentioned the distinction between the inner and outer protection. Let us consider in how far these differ from each other. Our body reveals the inner self. It is directed through this inner self, that uses the body as its vehicle. The vehicle needs its own kind of protection. The inner self can express itself when its vehicle is suited and the correct natural laws are activated at the right moment. The body must get the right food and create the correct circumstances under which the inner self can make itself knowable. The body must be able to fulfil its role. Consequently not only our vehicle but also the environment in which it resides, must be brought on a higher level.

Our inner self can use the body only well when it has the entourage to stay healthy and vital. This offers protection. The environment must change when it no longer answers to our inner demands, for else we will dispose of it. This changes our life or it comes to a natural or unnatural end. We leave the old situation behind us and enter a new field of living. When we are dedicated and are serious towards the subjects in which we are trained, we will develop the certainty that we can withstand negative and dangerous things.

We will not be able to use this ability at once, but protection increases the longer we progress. Initially we mainly navigate on what our visible school tells us. Soon however we learn to trust the lessons of the higher self, the lessons that we receive from our inner school. Then our progress really begins and we become ever stronger. We learn to withstand the undesired, provided that we take heed of the natural laws. We come into touch with undesired situations, undergo their influence, cannot yet exclude them, but learn to defend ourselves. It takes a much progressed consciousness to really exclude the undesired, which is much more difficult than simply making the undesired bearable. Somebody once said: "Give me the ability to change what I can change, the patience to accept what I cannot change, and the insight to distinguish between these two." The manner in which we enjoy protection depends on the extent to which we are open to teachings. The more subtle the lessons are with which we can make ourselves conversant the stronger the protection becomes. In the initial phases we may be a toy of forces that want to use us. The more we progress, the more we learn to contemplate things and keep the energies at bay that we do not want to grant access. In the ideal case we no longer cause negative vibrations in our environment.

Because it is not feasible to always keep a steady mind we regularly go through all these stages. As soon as we are capable to keep energy impulses under control and to exclude destructive powers, we move on a pure level that in the best way coincides with our personal possibilities. We can also descend to the lower levels, but the farther they are removed from our target, the surer it is that we can only move in those lower regions wilfully. We can do this by way of experiment. When we do something like this we must realize how risky it is. It is better to reside on the best level, for why should we unnecessarily endanger ourselves?

Once we can defend ourselves and are able to neutralize opposition big things are possible. Our progress is mainly obstructed by fear. It comes into being when our mind perceives something of which it thinks that it will make it suffer. When the attacking element is recognized and labelled our mind will try to control it or give it a place. And although we often manage to do this it is very human that now and then we experience fear. We have a perception, but we do not work from a neutral point of departure like for instance white corpuscles do. When they perceive that a strange organism enters the body they make a dash for it. They do not wonder whether they will survive it. No, they are just themselves up to the deepest core of their being and answer to their assignment. They do not know fear. When the white corpuscles would have no consciousness they would have no awareness of the intruders whom they approach, and would never be able to perform their tasks. The more remarkable it is that they just go about their business, not distracted by the threatening nature of their opponents. Through their innate knowledge the white corpuscles are capable of executing the action for which they were called into life. The consciousness of the little organism is limited, but it encompasses every necessary knowledge to distinguish an alien substance from other things in the body. Through that the white corpuscles know what the real nature of their opponent is. And from knowledge comes control. When we are attuned to the higher self we see through things. We will master them. When we know what the nature is of that which appears on our path, we can immediately adapt to it. When it appears to be positive we can immediately make an alliance with it. When it is negative, we should make a stand against it by isolating ourselves and by mobilizing protective powers, mainly only by progressing in that which is good.

Sometimes the immediate course for such a clever jump to safety appears to be a trifle, almost insignificant to almost anybody. But when we as mystics become entangled in a negative situation we know whether we must retreat. We judge that on the basis of what we perceive inwardly, and do not pay attention to the outer innocence of what presents itself to us. During walking the mystical path we gain insight. We learn to look through things. When we deem it desirable we erect a screen of light and through that ward off all the wrong things. In our deepest tendency we are at the mercy of nothing.

108. The incompatible

Aristotle, the pupil of Plato, is well-known as an empirical philosopher. He examined the rules in things existing, and founded his world view on what he could observe and argue. He designed categories of know and perceptible things, of classifications. In the 12th century the doctrine of Aristotle was disclosed to the west, and the Roman Catholic church embraced the style of argumentation of Aristotle. Not so much by abandoning its own doctrines, but by renaming them on the basis of the doctrine of substances and categories of Aristotle. So just about as if one would want to compose a revised database of the ecclesiastical terms. This in itself does not damage the bases of doctrine, and in that sense the new line would not have to be considered as striking. Nevertheless the step is remarkable. For obviously the catholic body of thought is based on a number of assumptions that by definition cannot be proven. The creation of the world in a number of days, the salvation merit of Christ, heaven, purgatory, hell, the immaculate conception of Maria, the original sin, the salvation doctrine, the Holy Trinity, the presence of Christ in consecrated bread and wine, the pardoning of sins through going to confession, they are all doctrines. Not seldomly have they been established by acclamation on an ecclesiastical conclave. This doctrine can maintain itself towards critically inclined persons on the basis of a number of psychological anchors: threatening with excommunication at derogatory way of thinking, denouncing of absolution, or bodily violence - like in the days of the inquisition. It is clear that a doctrine is no empirical science. Aristotle was pre-eminently an empiricist. That which could not be seen by him, could according to him be true, but that was about it. What then does it mean that Aristotle has had such an enormous influence on the philosophical and theological scholasticism? What reason may the church have had for that? I deliberately say 'reason', and not 'cause', because it did not just happen to the church, but must have been a conscious choice.

From a psychological point of view an institute based on a doctrine, being in possession of means to enforce this doctrine, does not need to adapt methods of investigation that are fundamentally different from those already applied. But when this doctrine would stagger it could be useful to explore a path that might render the doctrine permanent. If nonetheless a doctrine with a stable, unthreatened basis accepts an external touchstone (read: the philosophical method of Aristotle), it possibly is a token of great enlightenment with the ecclesiastical leaders. For in that situation one prevents a stiffening of one's own position; one does not want to be in a rut, and wants to add a dimension to the existing situation, although strictly speaking one does not need this for consolidating one's own position. Evidently it would lead us too far afield to determine what reason the church may have had to follow the track of Aristotle. For to this end it would have to be sifted out who the initiators have been - if any can be established-, what their possible aims have been, what possible resistance they have met with and how they have been able to parry it. That is a question worthy of a dissertation. It is certain, that introducing Aristotle in the church was much the same as getting the Trojan horse in.

We can compare the then church with a construction work erected on a number of theories and doctrines, which were all left out of the discussion. At least, it was allowed to discuss them, but without the footing under those propositions being damaged. With Aristotle's doctrine in fact new footing was put under this doctrine. By following the mode of operation of Aristotle, this is, determining fact after fact and linking them to the doctrine, a new

ecclesiastical building would arise. But this method was of course brought in to achieve one thing only, namely the acceptance c.q explanation, even the legitimizing of the doctrine. The shortcomings thereof are evident. All the facts and discussions and analyses that had been introduced in the doctrine had to support this doctrine, had to serve this purpose and had to be interpreted in such a manner that they supported the superstructure. And this requires the usual mental agility. Because as the doctrinal points are more thin and less accessible for control or empirical research, all the more one leans on the facts and the intellectual analysis in the manner of Aristotle. It is a hopeless assignment, and thus it is not strange that Aristotle's method of working has lead to a scholastical development that could only make the church come to a dead end. Through Aristotle the already directive church became even more directive. People like Erasmus have ridiculed the innumerable incongruities that were the doing of the scholastics. If you start reasoning about all kinds of theological assumptions, on main points therefore, on premises, which can never lead to a valid conclusion, you only add on to your mental world on quicksand.

Now it would be conceivable that enlightened minds within the church had embraced the Aristotelian working method, departing from the realization that both belief and reason are two divine human properties, and that one should not neglect the one in favour of the other. In other words, it is not unthinkable that the ecclesiastical leaders were of the opinion that one also had to embrace the intellectual analysis and the empirical working method as methods which could introduce a better balance in human thinking. With which the doctrine would still be hierarchically put above this intellectual analysis. There is a danger in this, not so much that one uses the intellectual analysis for legitimizing the doctrine, but rather for letting it be a kind of lightning conductor for intellectually inclined, critical minds within one's own ranks. Give the analytics something analytic to do, and they are less inclined to pass criticism.

I doubt if the ecclesiastical leaders would have wanted to accept the ultimate consequences of their embracing of the doctrine of Aristotle, i.e. that one would have had to recognize that reason under no circumstances should have to mean an obstruction for conducting a perfectly attuned and loving life, in the tradition of Christianity, with which a mediator would no longer be necessary. That salvation cannot be made dependent on observing dubious dogmas. Through this consequence the construction works of belief - if not at all dismantled - would have to be reviewed drastically. And then a very particular synthesis would have been conceivable, namely that studying nature in an empirical manner, could have led to a deepening of mental life, this is without dogmas, purely aimed at inner, mystic harmonization, possibly grafted on the idea that there is a divine leading force in all people.

It is however not astonishing that the Aristotelian way of thinking did not automatically lead to a synthesis with the ecclesiastical doctrine. Seen the hierarchical relations within the church this would have been inherently impossible anyway. When two intellectual schools of thought are set against each other to provide indisputable facts with interpretations and to compare them, one might imagine that they fecundate each other and lead to new insights. But a debate in which a belief and an intellectual theory try to find each other, is doomed to fail in advance when the participants are not completely free to express themselves and to be opposed to points of departure, and when the one method (intellectual analysis) is considered subordinate to the other (the accepting of the doctrine without reservations).

An balance between the methods is required at least to guarantee their going together. Thomas Aquinas has tried to shape this integration. But the question is, if such an artificial integration, implemented at all costs, brings about a factual harmony of incompatible opposites. The question is also whether the balance, no more than that should go the other way, namely that one reaches the conclusion that the empirical, analytical way of thinking is superior to the acceptance of doctrinal points on authority. The fundamental question must remain: what can we know as human beings, and how do we obtain knowledge. In the final analysis therefore: what is science? How do we know things? What is truth? With which instruments do we acquire knowledge? Are they formed by mental insight, intellectual analysis, acceptance on authority, intuition, revelation?

The church, through the incorporation of the intellectual analysis, which possibly reached its peak in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas, but also through the hair-splitting of the judges of the Inquisition (the latter strangely enough sprouting forth from the Dominican Order, to which also Aquinas belonged), further and further strayed off of silence, which can only be found in meditation, where the intellect is stopped. The applied instrument of the intellectual analysis could only lead to one thing, namely a scholasticism carried out to absurdity, which inevitably had to lead to an implosion, or a reform.

In our time the circle seems to be closed again. Because the doctrine of Christ pre-eminently was a mystic one. It was expanded theologically by the church fathers, and yet linked with a deep personal development, experience and ascesis (see its synthesis in the life of Augustin). Further on in time the doctrine was rationalized. As a result the individual interpreting - the inner attuning to higher things - retreated into the background. The Enlightenment, the Romantic Movement and the rise of science seemed to reinforce this even further. Up to the point where via a roundabout route of a possibly too elaborated scientific specialization the notion of the limitations of the human mind and of the incomprehensibility of nature again brings us to our senses. The rise of the spiritual movements in our time seems to be a symptom of this.

109. The maximum attainable

In life we strive after many things. We manage to achieve one thing but the other one remains out of reach. Such is life. But striving remains. Many things that we pursue are an exponent of our aim for self-preservation. Thus we want to have food, a roof above our heads, clothing to dress ourselves. These are the primary needs on the so-called pyramid of Maslow. It is not a pyramid in the sense that you must start entirely at the bottom to reach the upper step. However, requirements are found in a form of hierarchy. At the basis are the primary biological needs: eating, drinking, sex. Then social security follows. Afterwards social need. Next comes recognition. And at the top of the pyramid is self-education. No sooner than we have met the requirements of the first step we seem to be able to start with the requirements of the second step, but how 'higher' the step is that we reach, the more the other requirements can be maintained next to them. The biological needs seem to come in the first place. But I think that within it an new range can be introduced, a pyramid in a pyramid. Thus the need for air and water probably will score the highest on a subpyramid within the first step of the pyramid of Maslow, because a lack of it will be paid for first. Also within the other steps subpyramids can be erected.

As we can fulfil our primary needs, our attention and energy is released for pursuing other things. The anthropologists depart from the idea that through distribution of work man found the time to relax. Staring in the flames of a fire laid for the night he reached self-reflection. With that he could consciously concern himself with forming thoughts about natural phenomena to which he was submitted each day: rain, lightning, storm, tornados. Discussion took place and with that slowly the development of technique, magic, religion and science came about. We now live in a world in which - at least in the west - all our needs can be satisfied. In a time in which a certain decadence develops, we have to face the question: now what? What can we still pursue in a society in which you have everything already? Self-realization seems the final stage with Maslow. But also within that we can create levels. Not only because there can be kinds of self-realization (social, economic, cultural), but also because a classification in ethical or unethical, mystic or nonmystical self-realization is conceivable, or in self-realization that entirely ignores the needs of other people, or has no spiritual component.

You might even imagine pyramids existing next to each other. Or that you can skip the steps of the pyramid. Of the lowest step everyone will agree that eating and drinking are absolutely necessary. But what about social need? Possibly it will not apply to a hermit. It also depends whether one assumes that every step must be completed before one can start with the next one. It is most obvious that they indicate an ideal ranking instead of a practical one.

How would our life be when we see the step of the pyramid, the highest objective, come on the screen? This does not take away the question why things are as they are. Because we always keep asking ourselves the question what it is all in aid of. Why do we have all those achievements? In a world full of achievements, altruism must be the path that must be taken. Achievements must be shared. But if we have shared them with others, what then is our new perspective, our new aim? And why do we always seek such an aim? Why do we not lean back and think the matter over? Is it unrest, feeling of guilt, or something else, that leads us to an ever renewed quest for a goal? Or is it an innate urge for expansion, for self-realization? If

so, this pursuit - linked with unrest - will never end. We would always keep striving for something that lies higher, or outside our reach.

If we get the elementary needs fulfilled, we do not actually leave this step, but come to the point where our consciousness is no longer exclusively focused on our physical body. Philosophy, religion and persuasion complete it, with which we enter the mental area of objectives. Next altruism completes on the moral level. From all this a mutual attachment arises, and love is its highest step. Finally we will also feel the need for a contact that exceeds the thinking capacity and the theological discussion. There mystic activity comes into being, the Great Work, which - as far as we can comprehend it - reflects the highest level of human striving; the supplement on the spiritual level.

Each step is connected with a certain need, and between divergent steps links can exist. Thus someone who finds himself at the end of his life, and strongly longs for unification with a celestial area, might no longer have an appetite for food, or no longer want to eat. Appetite is a primary necessity of life, but we see that it has to serve a purpose, namely maintaining the physical body. And when this purpose is no longer present, the need no longer forms a need, but it becomes an obstruction. Something that must be rejected, just as the social intercourse with other people has become a burden for the hermit. Because it is not appropriate in the phase in which he finds himself in his highly personal development. Beside the scale of needs of Maslow we might also construct a parallel or mirrored scale of impediments. That which is of the utmost importance for a primitive being, may no longer be so for a developed human being, and the other way round. But it may also be that both not even want to ascend each others step. In that case we no longer speak of someone having left an earlier step; he rather by definition did not want to get there.

All steps however always have something that links them together, which is the urge to self-preservation. At the onset perhaps the mere conservation of the material organism, for that is all that we knew. The moment we started to develop as human beings, reaching self-reflection, strange secondary phenomena arose, such as moral standards, the feeling of guilt, legislation. But also tempering justice with mercy; punishment and forgiveness. They form the exponent of our development and our new achievements. For the sake of self-preservation we had made rules to survive in a group. And also self-preservation urged us to awaken mystically.

110. Making choices

When we stand in front of a picture or some other piece of art or an object, that is, before a human creation regarding a nonverbal expression of the mind not accompanied by gestures, our mind creates an impression for itself. It attracts or repulses. This is the first result of a confrontation: a first choice, coming into existence from the (sub)consciousness. Next comes remembrance: the object does or does not depict something and we perceive it. When it depicts something we compare it with what we already know, and an exchange begins between memory and object, in a transposition that quickly goes to-and-fro, with which we constantly adapt our picture, just as long as necessary and until it converges with what we already know. When the object has no recognizable depiction, this is to say, recognizable for us, the same process takes place. Maybe a bit more convulsively, because we are inclined to dig in our memory until we have found a recognizable pendant in it. Even a totally abstract object or an abstract image will elicit something in our memory here and there.

With an exchange of thoughts something similar takes place as with noticing an object. We let that which has been spoken affect us, and we mirror it to what we carry with us in our memory. Somebody states his point of view and we immediately go about dissecting it at all fronts, not just with regard to its direct content. We weigh whether the speaker may have reported his point of view before and has remained consistent with it. Is he going to contradict himself, seen the things he asserted last month? Do word and gesture express what he tells us with respect to content? We desperately need this apparent secondary information. Information alone, so purely based on content, does not seem to occur. Not in a conversation, nor when standing before an object. In a conversation (also in a performance on television), where we are confronted with a fellow human being who in a sense tries to impart something on us or tries to convince us, we must go after secondary information, for it is a means to protect ourselves. We want to know what we are up to, and whether we must act. We want to class it. Whoever tells us something cannot without reservation count on our unconditional consent. A reservation that consists of us making all kinds of tests and making choices. Otherwise we would buy something from any entrepreneur just because he tells us that it is good for us. And everything that appears in the newspaper would be accepted by us blindly. If we do not weigh information we get unsheltered and in many cases jeopardize ourselves. However it is also true that we accept much more from somebody whom we trust. To weigh whether it is true what we hear we then investigate comparatively less.

When we observe an object there is no fellow human being at issue whose expression we must validate. We are confronted with an object, not with a human being. We then feel more free to let the object - that can be the expression of an absent fellow human being - make an impression on us. In how far is the object subordinate to what its maker has been able to express with it? And what is more valuable: the object or that which has been expressed through it? Where then is the ultimate link between the information aimed at us, and our final acceptance of it? Determining whether information is true or is valid for us, is directed by our emotional response, but also through our intellectual analysis. Finally, and this brings us to mysticism, through our Inner Master, who is the last touchstone to weigh information.

How far will this go? This is a field that is seldomly elaborated. Generally a mystical school postulates, that a long winded training for susceptibility leads to an invigorated inner

perceptive faculty. A doubting mystic will seek the real answers to his questions in himself in the last resort. But to which fields does this relate? When somebody is faced with the choice to engage as a volunteer in the inlands of Africa it has an enormous impact on his personality. He enters other cultures, perhaps will have to leave hearth and home for many years, and the impressions that he will get will influence him for the rest of his life. In this example both an emotional and intellectual and spiritual consideration of the step to be taken is very understandable and desirable.

But not all the things that we intend to do have such an impact. When we are at the bakery and weigh up whether we are going to buy a white or brown loaf, we may rely on a number of visual impulses, made complete with what we find back in our memory. We like the colour of the bread or we do not. And we decide to buy or not buy this or that. I can hardly see you going into consultation with your deepest inner self to come to a choice. The more we are confronted with more profane choices, the more we shall fall back on emotion and intellect. As the choices become more essential the spiritual consideration comes on top of it. But then a new question arises. At which point in the numberless circumstances in which we find ourselves in daily life do we know whether it is a situation that compels us - or makes it necessary - to consult our inner self? Of many circumstances it is obvious when this is not necessary, and in ever so many cases we know that it is absolutely necessary. In between there is a field in all kinds of degrees in which we will want to go about with subtlety, and then the spiritual test will come up.

How then will we examine? On the one hand on the basis of the experiences that we have got with ups and downs. With our intellect we can sense in which situations we have realized the same results with the same choices. Next it is the training through meditation, contemplation and concentration that slowly makes us more accessible inwardly. When acting the voice of our inner self will then take over. Instead of mentally having to decide in any situation if we have to consult our deepest inner self and really are going to do that, any situation gradually calls up this voice spontaneously, when it is needed. In the beginning of a mystical study it is a matter of dinning everything in: just plain exercising, trying to understand the explanation of the mystical laws. And meanwhile just continueing living the life that we had led, with which we will regularly sigh: "Oh yes, now I should in fact have applied this or that mystical law." Learning the ability to consult the inner self does, in that, not differ so much from learning a craft. At some moment in time a mastering of the field comes into existence. But is remains enigmatic how exactly a carpenter learns to cut off a plank dead straight, or how the pianist after endless tries has found himself able to transform the unbearable sounds into an acceptable piece of music. The exertions seem to be lodged somewhere in our frame. The adding to those exercises seems to be anchored in our person, until it has become part of ourselves. Making choices is based on an ever increasing experience. This experience is built up both intellectually and mentally and spiritually, and comes about through practising - or rather repeating.

111. Enlightenment

What is Enlightenment? Within mysticism there are several points of view regarding this. The one is, that man through a long mystical evolvement reaches a point on which he suddenly gains an insight in Nature that transcends every kind of knowledge that he possessed up to then. A breaking point. Within this conception there is also a nuance, namely that this insight not only is different from another type of insight, but also that the person involved in one flash comprehends the whole of the cosmic. The other view on enlightenment is that it is a state of mind that one acquires gradually, by steadily working on one's inner development. Therefore in that vision the acquiring of enlightenment is no breaking point, but a process, with which the already existing insights are gradually broadened and deepened. It is not easy to indicate which is true, or - if this cannot be established - to which theory preference should be given. If it is so that both theories are true, then it can at least be established that the gradual form of acquiring enlightenment precedes the sudden form. For everybody can tell by the people around him (by the nonmystics also) that they develop gradually, and as a rule demonstrate an increase in insight in their behaviour through the years.

The notion enlightenment is of course only a metaphor, and in this metaphor - in which enlightenment is opposite to darkness - one will see that we are accustomed to the terms 'striking light' next to 'extinguishing light'. In the period when man began to enlighten his world with fire, this came about slowly and with much difficulty. As his development progressed and his knowledge of nature increased, he learned to better ignite the light and to keep it burning. This is also the case with the inner light. The most important question with the above mentioned breaking point theory is, whether a consciousness can be conscious of everything at the same time at all? Psychology tells us that it can not. But perhaps this enables us to make a third kind of enlightenment theory by putting, that enlightenment is achieved gradually, and that during this process sometimes moments occur in which the enlightenment is very determining for us with regard to one aspect in our life. At that one point an insight breaks through regarding the things that we have been obsessed with for ten of years, putting everything in a clarifying light. After that the gradual enlightenment gets the upper hand again until anew a breaking point arises in which one facet of our life suddenly becomes very clear to us. How is enlightenment achieved? The gradual attuning to that which enlightens us, brings us in another field, in which we gain insight. Or, as mysticism tells us: "When the student is ready the Master appears." Or: "When the student takes one step towards the Master, the Master will take ten steps towards him." A good intention supported by a fine intuition leads to spiritual growth, to enlightenment. This is a natural law. For that, it is not at all necessary to renounce everything that attracts us in earthly matters, and to go living in a monastery on the mountain or in a cabin in the moors. Enlightenment is within reach anywhere: in silence, but even when we are walking in town in a busy shopping street.

112. Decorum

What exactly does the notion decorum encompass and what role does it play in our ritual work? According to the leading Dutch dictionary Van Dale, under decorum it is understood: "External dignity, decency, appropriate external forms." Surprising at this definition is, that it talks about 'external ' forms. With decorum it is not about inner forms. When we talk about external forms, we think of the furnishing of an official space, or of the behaviour of persons. The term 'external forms' calls up the idea that it is less important, or of inferior quality than forms of an inner level. But that something has an external form, as is the case with decorum, does not mean that there is talk of 'varnish'. External forms are not a per se hypocritical or but an empty sheath. On the contrary, decorum leaves room for forms of an outer and inner level. With decorum we have to do with the symbolic meeting of the spiritual and the earthly things. Furthermore, belonging to decorum are number, measure, law and order. The decorum knows a fixed frame of regulations, and they are in fact a reflection of laws on the spiritual plane. As it has already been said decorum has to do with a certain order. It is a scheme of points on which we can build, as is the case with laws of nature, and this gives a kind of certainty. Perhaps this is why we have such a need for decorum.

By the way, what is the difference between the 'ritual ' and the ' decorum'? For they seem to be very close. When we talk about a decorum at ceremonies, the ceremony is what it is all about, for example an installation. To the ritual belongs the manner of walking, the taking of an oath, and the transfer of the function, and even the manner of speaking. This all happens in a quieted down, solemn manner. It belongs to the ritual, but at the same time is it an aspect of the decorum. A ritual is not loosely performed. To the implementation much attention is given. For this reason the ritual has a decorative side or, differently said, the decorum has a ritual side. To the decorum also belongs that which has to do with the framing. For example, the fact that during some ceremonies the present visitors do not speak, is a matter of decorum. It is not a part of the ritual itself. Decorum also has to do with the furnishing of a space. For instance at a ceremony a decoration is applied, so that the people present are brought in a certain atmosphere. With the decorum we indicate which things we observe to be able to attend the ceremony with esteem. Actually the decorum shápes this esteem.

We will agree that an inner form which does not go together with an external form, will not be done justice. We then feel that there is a lack of profundity. If the decorum in a negative manner is in contrast with the true intentions of the performers, then the external form is only a varnish. When we are present at a ceremony, for example a commemoration, an opening or an appointment, we will try to be dignified inwardly and attuned, and at the same time want to show that we want to behave ourselves this way. Something reminds us at solemn occasions to show a behaviour that is in line with that ceremony. And we do not make up this behaviour, nor is it a law of nature, but it has been demonstrated to us at any time, and then we were told that that type of behaviour belongs to that type of ceremony. It has do with a sense of proportions. Someone who has a sense of proportions, is considered by us to be balanced, logical and comforting. There is also a sense of proportions of a more mathematical nature. For example when we sense which colours in an interior go together and which do not, or when we sense if the composition in a painting is correct or not. Proportions are important in our lives, because they indicate an arrangement. Order for its part means predictability, security, reliability, therefore something that we can fall back on, which gives

us grip when we want to know a direction, or when we want a grip on our environment. A decorum offers us this grip.

With ceremonies we see that there is a lot of room for order and proportions, therefore for decorum. When somewhere a decorum is observed it indicates that something is going on for which everything that constitutes ordinary life is put aside. There is a solemn situation, that stands out above the ordinary, particularly because everyday living is seriously broken out of. When we look back at it later, we see that also thanks to the decorum a marking in time has taken place, and this marking makes, that the ceremony so to speak has been encased, safely put away in a type of treasury, which now and then we can open in our memory for a while, to be reminded that once it concerned a unique moment. For this reason the decorum is especially important if something has occurred that has unsettled our daily scheduling, as with a death. But also if nothing has been unsettled and the ceremony is just there to achieve some sort of order - or to mark an arrangement, for example an inauguration or a marriage - the decorum is a symbol of the arranging principle. The arranging principle, which corresponds with number, order and measure.

Scheduling has to do with cleanliness and carefulness, and it also has an element of style. It touches us positively inside when somewhere we discover a nice regularity in something. If we notice that much attention has been spent on something, when it is perfect, we feel better than when we are in chaotic surroundings, or in a situation in which everything elapses without any scheduling or decorum. However, it is of course very personal what our limits are in calling something chaotic. Someone may think very orderly, and nevertheless have a chaotic desk, or love wild dancing festivals. Someone can have improvising talents, and yet love very structured music. So scheduling does not have the same contents for everybody. Yet it frequently occurs in social living that a certain scheduling is created in the form of decorum, which we all recognize and respect. Just think of the modesty during Remembrance Day, or the ceremony with an academic promotion. Although some take a dim view of such ceremonies most of the people will conform to them, especially when they are invited as a guest to be part of it. Sometimes you hear people say: "It is all part of the game." The decorum of this type of ceremonies can persist very long, because the assertion that it is part of the game is seldom brought up for discussion, and nearly nobody wonders who is the inventor of it all.

Now we come to a very important aspect of the decorum, namely the 'belonging to'. If the decorum is part of the game, then to what does it belong? Eventually to ourselves. When we participate in it, we belong to it. When we show to have respect for a certain decorum, it is an entry permit for acceptance in certain circles, and to belong. Turning it round the showing of a lack of respect for decorum is an expression of protest. When someone mingles in a group and wants to maintain himself inconspicuously, he will adapt to the course of behaviour, to the 'mores' of this company. This includes participating in the ritual and other regulations of that group, and this also includes its customary decorum. With this he masters the situation in which he finds himself. Observing a decorum therefore also has a magical aspect. It is, as it happens, the implementation of an inaugurational operation, an action that with a company calls up the thought that the outsider is beginning to be a part of their circle, at least, that he does everything to belong to it. Observing a decorum is therefore an access key to a certain circle of people. A decorum is not by definition edifying by the way, even when the Van Dale

does not recognize this. A negative or destructive group of people may very well have its own decorum, and a violation against this decorum places the person outside that group. But usually we couple the term decorum to a refined manner of participating in a solemn occasion, and to the way the space in which this refined ceremony takes place is handled.

We may wonder if it can be a negative matter if we join the decorum, in the sense that we sacrifice part of our freedom by our keeping to restrictive rules. I think that our entire lives know those restrictions. Life itself is full with regulations of course. It applies to the way we eat when company is present, or how we behave in circumstances which have to do with the etiquette. Of course it limits us in a way, but the price is not too high. From the inside we are free. Persevering all our own wishes on the other hand will mean a restriction of our freedom, because it would dispel us from several companies. We will then end up in an isolation, and the freedom which we then harvest will do us no good, because we would only be able to enjoy it in complete confinement. We constantly stick to rules and decorums, but in the restriction which we impose on ourselves we get more freedom at the same time, a broader perspective, a new horizon. Also, our will to observe rules and a decorum has introduced us to groupings of which we want to be a member. Not only does the accepting of a decorum create a way for us to belong to a certain group, at the same time it also forms a barrier for other groups, which one wants to keep outside one's own circle. Decorum is therefore as a portal: for one person it is an invitation and at the same time it repels unwelcome persons. It therefore also has the aspect of the Guardian on the threshold.

It can happen that with respect to the decorum sometimes something goes wrong. Something like that can always be solved, and does not have to make a painful affair of the ceremony, if one only goes about it sensibly and with judgement. Especially with love and a sense of perspective. During a ceremony something can occur that has not been planned, and for which an intervention is necessary. If breaking through the decorum is necessary and must lead to an adaptation, a quiet treatment may mean that a present layman does not notice that something goes wrong. The situation is then solved in such a smooth manner that the adaptation seems to be a component of the initially planned fulness, and does not have to lead to panic. Should the adaptation not entirely escape the visitors, then from their nonverbal communication it may become clear that they realize the humour and the relativity of the situation. It breaks the tension, and supposedly you all have encountered such a situation, for example when a small child walks through the ceremony all of a sudden, loudly calling and laughing during an otherwise serious meeting. Humour is an important component of human life, and it does not need to be left out, not even in more or less solemn situations.

Sometimes something seems to violate the decorum although in reality it does not. In an already entirely arranged space that is prepared for a ceremony, one may discover that something important has been forgotten, for instance an attribute. Perhaps because of a sudden large attendance chairs must be acutely hauled. This of course is a very domestic matter that in no way contributes to the ritual meeting. Neither does it belong to the decorum. But from the rest and silence with which this necessary adaptation can be carried out, respect may be demonstrated for the surroundings in which one finds oneself. In no way would it have to be experienced as annoying. From it it can be learned that a violation of the decorum does not mean a violation of the decorum by definition.

Now how sacred is the decorum in fact? With that we end up with what was said in the beginning, concerning the reason why the decorum has been introduced and why it exists. It is a means to be aware of laws and proportions. As long as this is our motive to maintain it, it has an inaugurating meaning for us. An initiation tries to impart something on us that is experienced and processed by us at an unconscious level. But for this inner inauguration we always use external resources. When they touch us inside, appeal on our capacity to attune to something that is hidden very deeply in ourselves, as long as we have that in mind, decorum is useful. The decorum is a scheme of operations which we have introduced very consciously. As long as we continue to realize its value we can maintain them. Our self-awareness can create certain circumstances. As a result it can observe itself better. We set up conditions consisting of rituals and decorum. Next we submit ourselves to them voluntarily.

113. The role of the laws of nature

To have the right picture of the tuition that the inner self needs, it must be clear by which natural laws the development of this inner self is determined. Such laws are called 'natural laws' or 'cosmic laws'. These terms are not completely identical. When there are natural laws in the universe they are cosmic of necessity, because they appear in the cosmos. But although both terms are often used at random, the term 'cosmic law' is applied in a different manner in mysticism. With the common 'natural laws' are meant for instance the laws of electricity as they have been phrased by the physicists. But when mystics talk about 'cosmic' laws they think of the law of karma, or the law of duality, or the law of reincarnation, which are very special and remarkable for a human being as they are active in every part of his frame and soul personality and determine his personal future. The distinction is subtle, for we are also governed by the laws of electricity and by all kinds of other laws. So knowledge of the other laws is important as well. The true distinction is that the term 'cosmic laws' is often reserved for the part of nature that has to do with mysticism.

There is no such thing as an index of natural laws or cosmic laws. Science and mystical science are only yet beginning to understand a small part of what it is all about. A lot of discoveries are yet to be made. Today it is even so, that when somebody comes with a new theory regarding the universe or reality, our understanding of the already phrased natural laws may no longer be valid. Then we are forced to develop a whole new concept of what some phenomenon really means. When we observe a new regularity in the universe, we can subsume it under a different, new description, in a law that is. But even if we would possess a complete index it would take years to even grasp how one single law, for instance the law of the triangle, works. It takes years to understand that our deeds lead to other deeds and thus create karma. This is an example of the triangle, but it takes a long time before we appreciate its working and accordingly arrange our lives.

114. Illusion

Is life an illusion? In quantum physics the quest for the ultimate element or particle seems to lead to even more emptiness. Even the hardest substances appear - if you are small enough - to offer sufficient space to go through it without encountering much. In existence it seems that there are more absent things than things present. Is it for that reason transitory, or unreal, or an illusion? To be able to say something about this, it is good to start with a definition of the term illusion. According to the dictionary the Grote Van Dale an illusion among other things is a phantasm in the sense of a delusion. Also a picture out of a dream can be understood by it, in the sense of an air castle, a utopia, a froth. We can to this add the term *fata morgana*.

Why do some philosophers call life an illusion? Possibly because when one infinitely and fruitlessly looks for a footing based on material certainties, and an inner certainty does not yet announce itself, there will be a vacuum that one still wants to give a name. The illusion then encompasses that everything is changeable and nowhere a certainty can be found. What we think something to be, time and again appears not to be it.

When we observe something inwardly our outwardly we instantly try to interpret it - consciously or subconsciously. We have to, because we can only continue our existence in security on the basis of our perceptions. So after the perception follows the interpretation, and as long as it needs no adjustment in the second instance, we will not talk of illusory observing or interpreting. But as soon as that which we counted to the observed reality proves to be different and therefore must be reinterpreted, we clearly feel that a new reinterpretation could follow that. And then nothing in life appears to be completely certain. Everything on which we base things is then a froth or a utopia. Or a *fata morgana*: there is something, but what is there, is not what it seems.

Does that make life difficult? When your judgement constantly fails and you always experience the negative results of that, this question can be answered in the affirmative. This mainly applies in a pathological situation, for example with someone who is psychotic, suffers from schizophrenia or delusions, or uses hallucinogenic drugs. Because the illusions that someone is then suffering may have a terrifying reality content.

The conclusion that life is an illusion, is strikingly often linked to an attitude to life that implies a certain reserve. Anyway, I have not yet heard someone link it to a bright outlook on life. It demonstrates a worrisome attitude, resignation also. When judgement capacity is of importance when concluding that life is an illusion, can we then find a way that leads to another conclusion? To this end someone always ought to be able to experience 'reality' in such a way as it actually is, without being forced to continuously adjust his interpretation of it. This asks for a very clear discernment in the regularities of existence. It takes a way of living in which one not exclusively depends on one's senses, and an open attitude and intuitive admissibility get a chance. The external and inner life will then melt into one another. Everything that exists will prove to be a unity. A difference between actuality and reality will have disappeared. The 'great mover' behind the phenomena will no longer be (apparently) separated from it, but penetrates those phenomena, and is also perceived as such. The observer and the observed have become a oneness.

Is it useful to call life an illusion? Say this to parents who have lost their child, or to a victim of war, or to a terminally ill person who suffers, or to someone who has lost his job and does not know how he must maintain his family. Then such a philosophy immediately becomes a would-be philosophy. The reality is, that we - with all our sensorial and other restrictions - observe the existence and ourselves just as we do. With that the term 'illusion' becomes effortlessly exchangeable with 'reality'. Because if everything is an illusion, then that is our reality, the reality with which we live.

115. The primitive human being

Everything is relative. Even regarding the notion 'primitive'. In our world old or contemporary civilizations are often labelled as primitive, with which one means that they are not yet developed far. At least, not as far as we. Differently said: civilizations that have not yet explored and exploited nature to the extent that air pollution, water pollution, the breaking up of the ozone layer, sophisticated weaponry, an imbalance between raw materials and prices, a high workload, stress, poor and incomprehensible legislation are the result. Civilizations therefore that have not yet become detached from a harmonious link between living and working, the cultivating of food for the necessity of life, of a simple but effective system of media of exchange. This means, civilizations that have not yet trodden the path to self-destruction. If we realize this we notice how haughty modern man is with respect to a way of life that is not merely about money, ego and looks.

A civilisation that possesses 'much', that has 'more of everything' than another civilisation, defines this other civilisation as primitive. But in the future one may call our current civilisation primitive as well. Now does this apply also to the mystical insights that we nowadays have? To this end we must distinguish how universal principles are discussed in mystic circles. We call a principle universal when it concerns a starting point that obviously can be maintained across the borders of time and space. Thus, irrespective of future developments these principles would not lose their validity. But does this also go for the shape that we attribute to those principles?

People in antiquity, ignorant about the true nature of for example electricity, worshipped lightning as a form in which the deity announces himself. In our time we know more concerning the nature of lightning. We would no longer adore it, but nonetheless can maintain the stand that - as a force of nature - it is an impressive symbol of the cosmic (de deity). In essence this will not change much about the human vision on the higher principles.

But now let us see whether, in analogy, the same can happen to us as those so-called primitive, lightning worshipping peoples of antiquity. We speak for example about cosmic masters, taking departure from our picture of forces that exceed the human ones as to personality. We must not rule out that future civilisations from their increased knowledge of the natural laws will align our worship of cosmic masters with the worshipping of lightning by even still older cultures. Perhaps one will then have a better insight in the natural laws, as a result of which the manifestations which we now attribute to cosmic masters will appear in a completely different light. The same may then apply as with regard to lightning, namely that a universal core may remain intact, and that a ultramodern explanation of what a cosmic master actually is has come into existence. One may still consider him as an impressive manifestation in the universe. And so on ad infinitum.

116. Communication

Recently again I heedlessly read in a book dealing with the Middle Ages, a passage that went something like this: "When (...) was in Europe he contacted (...)." You see this often, that somewhere it is mentioned that somebody in those days apprenticed himself somewhere, at a university in Padua and maybe later went to Paris for study, or founded an organization with branches in several countries. If we want to reach somebody we call, write, e-mail, sms, msn or fax him. In less time than needed for drinking a cup of coffee we inform somebody in Australia that we have a question, and the answer comes in again. How did people in those days handle the barriers of time and space, nowadays broken by us?

Suppose you are in England and want to go to Europe, for instance as an alchemist, to make contact with alchemists in Prague. First of all you had to have ample means. We take a tgv, a scheduled plane or a car with a gps system to quickly bridge large distances. There were none in those days. You first had to manage to reach the coast by walking, by horse, or with horse and waggon, then to embark, next to find a means of transport in a country alien to you. And after many weeks of travelling, during which you had to maintain yourself, you hoped to have reached your destination. All this time on your way you had to manage to get information about the route, sleeping accommodation, shelter, medical care and food. You had to manage to wash your clothes and dry them in time. Luggage trolleys did not exist, so you dragged along with you a minimum of equipment, unless you could have transported some kind of cabin trunk. All this time you had to have at your disposal some amount of money. There were not credit cards. So you carried your money on your body, possibly in the form of promissory notes. If you lost it on your way, or you were robbed by one of the numberless highwaymen you ran the chance of never seeing your native country again.

Before you left you had to say goodbye to all your loved ones. They would not meet you again in months or years or even would never see you back again. If you wanted to send messages you had to manage this through some courier service, if your courier did not lose his life on the way. Courier gone, message gone: in a possibly crucial chain an irreparable break. There was no regular postal service.

And then finally you arrive in Prague. Maybe you have an address, but ten to one the alchemist concerned has moved since long. You could not e-mail him in advance to request his most recent data. Maybe you asked at the town-gate if so and so had been noticed that day in the city. Now try to establish a big network with which you have to ask all kinds of people to cooperate, or with whom you must try to clearly define a workable strategy over many countries at the same time, like the dispersers of religious or mystical movements - but also commanding officers - did. You could phone nobody, everything was at a great distance. The average age of a human being was low. Nonetheless tremendously much has been achieved.

Teleconference? Never heard of it. Almost hopeless, but many people travelled criss-cross through Europe, made contact everywhere and even maintained their network. The whole of the infrastructure was incomparable to that of us. Therefore I am not amazed that it were mainly the well-of and noblemen with whom the artists, mystics, philosophers, cabbalists and scientists found shelter. All of them (noblemen included) needed the means to broaden their knowledge and - especially - to apply this knowledge or pass it on. For that financial sources

were present in abundance. Knowledge was power also in those days. Not merely the knowledge regarding warfair, but also knowledge of alchemy, chemistry, mechanics and medicine. Pre-eminently the royal courts were the place to defend your own case, and when you had the (local) sovereigns behind you the sky was the limit. Then you could safely and far broaden your knowledge, via the armed transports within which the noblemen moved. With that all parties concerned had their own agendas. The noblemen hoped that the alchemists and scientists would supply them with the coveted gold or weaponry without which their sphere of authority would remain limited. One expected the artist to speak the word of his employer, for instance by painting a flattering portrait or heroically recording a feat of arms. For this the artist often received a 'princely' fee. The alchemists and physicians hoped to receive enough means to undisturbedly do their own investigations, although not seldomly they ended up in a dungeon because they could not always perform their sidelines for their monarch to the desire of the latter.

We in our time can hardly imagine how one was capable of maintaining one's contacts in those days, for if you had just travelled for weeks to find person X. he himself might be on his way for weeks already to grant person Y. a visit. Something to make you disheartened and yet it worked. A generation or a life more or less did not matter. It is not surprising that in this seemingly romantic but actually brutal times the cathedrals kept being erected, with their view on a life after this life in which the final reward for all the exertions would be manifested. How nice it would be to be able to talk to somebody from that period. Our time-space frustrations consist of traffic jams, run awry computers, malfunctioning e-mail programs, interrupted network connections. And then it is about seconds, minutes or hours at most. What type of frustrations did typify the middle agers, in their battle with weeks, months and years?

117. Fear and superstition

One of the hallmarks of a civilization developing itself is the repelling of fear. The pressure of the mental sword that philosophers, fathers of the church and earthly sovereigns have hung above the heads of the people, the threatening with punishment, have for a long time prevented the investigation of nature. Fear reigned. Superstition, summoned by both the clergy and those who were not tied to religion or church, has contributed to this fear. Not everybody has allowed that his measure was taken for this bodice. There have always been freethinkers. Once the human mind realizes that it possesses logic, as an instrument that is just as valuable as intuition; that obeying the inner self can be in balance with the moral aims as formulated by man; that it can create peace in itself, then it can rise up from fear.

When the mind cannot yet reach this conclusion and is under the spell of fear and superstition, one would expect it to have a desire to escape that pressure. But a hallmark of fear and superstition is, that the individual is no longer capable of realizing that being freed from it, is a deed of will-power, that cannot be stopped by anybody if one can only comprehend this. This means that, although the compelling spiritual prescriptions and paralysing admonitions have brought a lot of suffering to humanity during the course of the centuries, they have been cherished by many. This would not have been the case if the violations had not been punishable so much and in so many shapes. For superstition is not hazardous and does not cause suffering and grief through the wrong or forced supposition that a certain phenomenon exists, or by us having to perform a certain act of necessity, but through the fear for sanctions. This threat is paralysing.

Everyone knows the most known forms of superstition: do not pass through under a ladder, look out on Friday 13th, the misfortune which will happen to you if a black cat crosses your path. They have directly to do with alleged personal, coming misfortune. There are also examples of superstition which govern the continued existence of a whole nation. A dramatic example was the advice of Aztec priests to their head Montezuma not to block the advance of the Spaniards, because it was predicted that they would come to claim their legitimate inheritance. It was the beginning of an all-destroying Spanish war against the Aztec people.

What makes superstition differ from belief? With 'belief' one usually means 'knowledge', as the counterpart of the 'superstition'. Yet the word 'belief' already indicates that 'believing' is different from 'knowing'. Superstition comes down to not knowing something for sure, but assuming it on the basis of suppositions or on the authority of others. In daily life the notion is used in the context of a formula, namely 'if you do (or do not do) this, then ...'. Both with belief and superstition the person who beliefs or who is superstitious does not found his point of view on knowledge of the laws of nature, but on a prescription, an assumption or a doctrine.

There are very interesting forms of superstition, which are related to rites, have a symbolic tenor and may even be closely linked with mysticism. The libation is a nice example of this. In antiquity it was customary with a lot of cultures to throw away part of the food during meals, or pour drinks on the floor. It was a token of gratitude to the gods for the fact that these provided people with food. With the libation one wanted to favourably predispose the gods, and at the same time bring about that they would provide the people with their graces in the

future again. There was therefore the assumption that there are gods, who interfered in a personal manner with man. The supporters of the libation nourished a personified image of God. They took it that the gods might be moved to something when people placate them. People thought that the gods, when they are not put in the right mood, would withhold favours from humanity. In this belief or superstition the impersonal functioning of the laws of nature remains behind the scene, as well as the fact that the harvest will surely succeed, even when no fertility rites are carried out. Superstition and magic go hand in hand. The interesting thing about the libation is the strong connection with the mystic idea that man must compensate for everything what he does and receives (the law of karma). With the libation, for that reason brought in a symbolic manner, someone emphasizes that he is a small part of the cosmos and grateful for what he has received. He wants to symbolically give something back. So that is the positive pendant of the nonmystical aim to compensate, and this other aim is, that someone wants to preclude that in the future graces are withheld from him.

If we do something to prevent something bad happening to us, does this have to do with fear? Anyway it has to do with prudence. Is this superstition? Only when we - on the basis of a dogmatic, unfounded, unscientific premise - expect that some misfortune can assault us. It is no superstition if when acting we take into consideration that negative results may be the consequence of neglecting laws of nature. Prudence then is not the fear for some punishment, but the result of our knowledge of nature. For when we know how the laws of nature work, we would not be sensible to neglect them, for it is logical that the result of that might be negative.

When superstition seriously masters one's daily functioning it can have adopted the form of a obsessional neurosis. Behind the compulsive acting or thinking may be found the conscious wish to ward off something, what we have already characterized with the formula 'if you do (or do not do) this, then ...'. Sometimes there is no conscious reason for the compulsive. The person in question only feels that he must do or think something because otherwise he feels unfortunate or restless. It is a form of superstition which results in fear. The fear consists of the fright of getting in a situation of instability.

Until well into the twentieth century many churchgoers have followed the ecclesiastical regulations because they were prescribed. The salvation of the souls of the believers would be jeopardized when they would not follow them. Thus baptism in the Roman Catholic church has for a long time been viewed as something salutary, namely as a sanctification to the divine, whereas the not being baptized was regarded a situation that severely threatened the salvation of the soul. Superstition and fear are - as the counterparts of the initiating and the ritualistic - striking factors, because the initiating should lead to the increase of the ability to function as a free human being. So that which should be able to free man of his shackles also seems to be able to bind him.

118. Evolution

Living organisms constantly undergo changes, which not necessarily need to succeed quickly. They can take place after the expiring of a certain duration. Now, has such a change occurred because otherwise the organism cannot survive, and because this organism must change considering the future? How does the organism determine this, in other words, how can a 'blind' organism look into the future, make assessments concerning the degree in which it can continue to exist with or without change? It is very easy for the biologists to say: This or that organism has adapted itself to its environment, or, on the basis of modified circumstances the organism has mutated.

What is an organism actually? According to the dictionary Van Dale it is among other things an 'organic construction, consistency of the parts of a functional whole'. This may include a simple or complicated vegetable, animal or human, living complex, so we are an organism too, with a part that we can influence consciously, and an autonomous part, that we can hardly influence (digestion, blood circulation, heart action, cell division). An organism reacts each time on its surroundings, for example on an attack with chemicals or bacteria. It seems to be a mechanical type of adaptation, with which the change is a necessary response to a pulse of a certain nature.

The mode of operation of a vegetable or animal organism, but also the mode of operation of the human autonomous system does not resemble what we as human beings would call 'acting on the basis of will-power'. It rather resembles a complete spinelessness and subordination, a complete harmony in the way in which it submits itself to influences from the outside. In it the law of the triangle is demonstrated perfectly: when an element in the organism A is affected by an impulse B, always the response C follows without interference of emotional or intellectual considerations that might function as a jammer. It resembles a reflex, purely aimed at surviving, instinctively. If we notice an inflammation in our body, we cannot always instantly explain why our body all of a sudden reveals it. Next it may become apparent that there is a cause that possibly can be remedied medicinally or surgically. In the meantime the organism has carried out its task, reactively. It can but react in one manner that is not thwarted by an intellectual, emotional or mental deliberation.

Also for a mutating organism it goes that it makes no assessments, nor can it make any. For example it cannot make an assessment towards the future to ascertain in which of the following four categories it wishes to be: that of a mutation that is advantageous, and remains; that of a mutation that is advantageous and does not remain; that of a mutation that is not advantageous, and remains; or that of a mutation that is not advantageous and does not remain. Now some time will be needed in which it must turn out whether a mutation is advantageous in such a manner that it must be kept within the organism and becomes hereditary. How can the organism determine this? It uses no terms as we do, for example regarding the term 'advantageous'. Yet this term is frequently utilized in relation to organisms which mutate or have mutated. If we want to assess how the organism is fairing and why, our own definition of terms as 'advantageous' and 'useful' (notions that can never be used by the impersonal organism itself) makes or breaks the 'argumentation' that we attribute to this organism. Unless we consider a complex organism that reveals a conscious activity (a human, an animal) to be the sum of a number of suborganisms, which each to a certain degree have a

cellular consciousness and a degree of will-power.

When we establish a definition of the term 'advantageous', how much authority has it? If we find something advantageous, is it then a universal term that in all times and in all cultures remains unaltered? If the organism 'determines' whether a mutation is 'advantageous', can this be an observation that takes into account the future? Suppose that the organism could talk, would it say: "I want to continue in this or that manner, modified, so that I can maintain myself in the future"? This is an interesting question, because when we ourselves change our lives forced by circumstances, we have made an assessment, weighing the pros and cons, and - looking ahead - decided to avoid something, to leave, to go somewhere, to take action, you mention it. Always with the intention to abandon the situation, considering the future - anyway the period after the present one. How does an organism do this, when it does not have a consciousness at its disposal as we know it from man or animal? When an organism mutates, will it then be compelled to determine that this mutation is useful in the future or advantageous with regard to viability or continued existence? Does it make a choice, grafted on the notion that it cannot continue in the old fashion? Does it outline this thought against the future, in which everything must therefore be done differently?

Suppose that nature wants to construct a mutation, so that the organism for example gets a camouflage, will then nature 'deem' this mutation advantageous, and how does it know that this is the case? As humans we try to personify the impersonal natural laws, and to attribute to them humane qualities, such as the ability to make decisions and assessments, and an objective. It strikes me that biologists tend to explain why animal qualities exist. If an animal for example is provided with some camouflage, they say that it has 'chosen' or 'developed' it in its environment to be less conspicuous. This ascribes to the animal an intention as that of a human being, the animal is personified. But they do not make clear and cannot explain why so many other animals walk around that have not been that clever.

When a certain feature manifests itself in a certain organism, will then this feature - when it proves to be useful - cause the organism to seek or find an ever better environment to ever better using this feature, which happens to be there? And if so, how does the organism know and do this? How for example does a certain animal know that its back does have a camouflage? And how does another animal know that it has to spread out its wings, in order that the spots on the back of it has an effect on other animals as of eyes?

For all that, is it what we must call an appearance of intellectual powers, or of consciousness, or of will-power? Conversely we might ask the question if the human will-power, as the 'consistency of the parts of a functional whole', is not only the total of an increasing scale of types of minor will-power - at a cellular level - to what we usually call the superior 'human will-power'. A will-power that as to its characteristic is just as spinelessness and subordinate as the situation at a micro level. Because also this big human will-power is the result of - and is logically bound to - the total of all the component parts of that human organism, with all the awareness that can be found in it. Therefore also with all restrictions of the same.

119. Harmony

Everything is in harmony. I can hear you thinking: I cannot have heard this right. For are not many things not in harmony? It appears that you are right, that is, on first sight. Because everything around us seems to be contradictory to harmony. We only have to turn up the paper, and wars and disturbances stand out. How then can we speak of harmony? And look at the animal world: the one species is even crueller than the other. Not to mention the food chain, that seems to be the proof that it is all about eating or being eaten. Where then is this harmony?

Each term used by man, so also the term harmony, is dependent on the definition given to it, and also with the individually accepting of that definition. Let us have a look at what the dictionary (Van Dale) understands by harmony. It starts its definition with the origin of the word, and speaks about 'Harmonia', as follows.

"Harmonia, conformity.

- 1) Cooperation or connection of a number of matters into a well-organized and agreeable whole, the being adapted of elements to each other and their environment.
- 2) Unanimity, good relationship, concord.
- 3) Pleasant sounding union of simultaneous or succeeding notes, especially the connection of simultaneously sounding notes according to strict rules, especially triads.
- 4) The conformity of all the voices, parts of a musical play."

In mysticism harmonia indicates a balance in our inner self; harmony between our self and our environment; and harmony between our self and the cosmic. When hearing the just mentioned definitions it does not end with mere hearing. Almost immediately images appear before our mind's eye. Probably, hearing the first definition, namely: "Cooperation or connection of a number of matters into a well-organized and agreeable whole, the being adapted of elements to each other and their environment", will at once have reminded you of the universe with all its eternal stars and planets. And very likely with the second definition, namely: Unanimity, good relationship, concord, you will at once have had in mind fraternity and peace and all those whom you love and like to see around you, whose presence you cannot do without for a second. And what about the third definition, namely: "Pleasant sounding union of simultaneous or succeeding notes, especially the connection of simultaneously sounding notes according to strict rules, especially triads"? It calls to mind music, healing, tonic consonances.

In fact Van Dale has given an enumeration of numerous important elements from the work of the esoteric schools. Harmony is an aspect of the cosmic, of unity, of cooperation or connection, of being adapted. From all this - and undoubtedly you can come up with even more definitions - one element very strongly forces itself upon us, which is that it concerns mutual relations. In the world, in the cosmos, there are connections between one thing and the other. They are the consequence of Nous, that subdivides itself into Spirit and Vital Life Force. In the duality that sprouts forth from Nous the manifold polarities arise, which all act on each other, and in the so-called dialectical manner form newer connections all the time. From A and B to C, whereupon C itself becomes an A again, that links itself with a B to a new C. Plotted on paper they form triangles which are interconnected. From all energies and

beings which thus originate from the cosmic, the law of Nature with a capital letter speaks. Everything is actually interconnected and is automatically connected so to speak, although the mind that is aware of itself is able to direct this and make choices.

When we look around us the world seems to be composed of disharmony. How do we reconcile this with our idea of harmony? If we look at the first definition from the Van Dale again, we find: "Cooperation or connection of a number of matters into a well-organized and agreeable whole, the being adapted of elements to each other and their environment." This definition speaks about an 'agreeable whole'. This is where the shoe pinches. It shows that harmony is usually identified or associated with something agreeable. In this vision the world is mainly disharmonic, because much in it does not strike us as pleasant. For this reason we can only understand the world if we eliminate the term 'agreeable' from the definition. But why should we, you may wonder. Why should we be blind to it? Yet it is very important to adjust the definition, and to understand this better, we should analyse the word 'agreeable'.

We call something harmonic, when it has a pleasant aspect. It seems that it has to have something that gives us peace. But is harmony always linked to peace? When parents call a child to account because it is involved in something dangerous, the intervention will grieve the child. Most of the time the parents themselves will also suffer because of this. By imparting something to the child that it can use later in life, they must apply a correction in the behaviour of the child that hurt them as well. Yet all this belongs to good parenthood. And although father or mother may prefer to allow their child everything, yet they must intervene now and then. All this ensures harmony in the child, but it can temporarily take away the peace from its parents. From this it can be derived that harmony in the strict definition from the Van Dale, in which it is linked to something pleasant, can not hold out in a mystical sense.

The mystic definition of harmony therefore indicates an impersonal, systematic proportion of the one with the other. So just like A belongs to a certain B and then forms a certain C. An example. He who throws a stone at a window dashes it to smithereens. This happens on the basis of certain laws, and in this sense the situation is 'harmonic'. Another example. He who in his daily contact with other people is pleasant will evoke pleasant responses. In that situation as well, the component elements are 'harmonious'. In the beginning I said something about the self-confident personality who can make choices. This is true, because this personality can distinguish between all kinds of situations which are in themselves harmonious, but of which some do and some do not go with him. All things answer to a regularity; they are in harmony as far as we look at the component elements from which they have been built. Now the most important thing is, that we must consider ourselves always to be one of the points of the triangle, therefore as one of the points of the dialectical process. Of each situation, built from A and B we must learn to sense whether this situation, that is harmonious in itself, is also harmonious with us, as the new point C. And then it may appear that a connection with that situation would bring us in a type of systematic harmony that we do not want to pursue, that we reject. Therefore such a situation remains harmonious in an absolute sense if taken by itself, but - in a relative sense - no longer when we bring it in relation with ourselves. At least, when we intuitively sense that then a type of harmony comes into being that we do not find pleasant. We may then decide not to connect with it.

Let us also think of the stages which take place in the alchemical process. There the impure is purified and the combined elements are separated and combined again. He who understands the Art, joins what must be joined, and keeps separated what must remain separated. Harmony in mystical essence is therefore formed by our ability to distinguish and then connect.

120. Mastery of life

Without exaggeration I may pose that the book *Self Mastery and Fate with Cycles or life*, or Dr. Harvey Spencer Lewis, is the most enigmatic that I have ever read. But at the same time it is not a book in the common sense of the word. The topic of enigmatic books generally is science fiction or fantasy; sometimes it concerns romantic literature. On the other hand a complicated book, for example concerning chemistry or astronomy, need not necessarily be enigmatic. The book *Mastery* is more than both. It is a cross between a manual, a management compendium, a fairybook and an instruction book for practical mental alchemy. It is not complicated, but reveals a fabulous vista to what must lie at its basis. It is a book for application and contemplation, just like *I the Tjing*. But even more is it a conjuring book. One might imagine that this is the type of book that a student of sorcery receives from his teacher at the end of his study. It is no lesson book. Because it imparts nothing to the reader concerning the backgrounds of all counsels. The author remains particularly mysterious about it. The book, however, gives many views on the mystical laws of nature which lie at its basis, but the student must in fact have completed the study in it, to be able to recognize what the basis is on which the book presents to him the counsels with which it is filled. It is rather a book of references, a compendium, just like a technician keeps in reserve a notebook with logarithm tables. But whereas this technician will fathom the underlying theory, the reader of *Mastery* will in his study unfruitfully search for such an explanation of the principles that - so to speak - on its basis he himself might draft the complete *Mastery* book as a book of references.

Recently I read somewhere that there is a fundamental classification at the basis of *Mastery* that is known within the study of the Rosicrucians, and which is related to the vocal sounds and the relation that they have with a colour, a mental centre and a chemical element. Unfortunately I no longer have the text of this theory. Notwithstanding it, even with this pointer it is not possible to exactly locate each advice, each council, each admonition in the framework of cause and effect. From my own experience I can say, that preparations or made appointments, executed through the directives of *Mastery*, run much more smoothly than one would deem possible. Also matters that from their nature can be very dragging, such as lawsuits, in a trice seem to be thwarted by unforeseen secondary circumstances with the application of *Mastery*, and can then be completed very quickly in a successful manner. Even so quickly that afterwards you wonder what happened. It is a fact that Harvey Lewis during his life has received a lot of acknowledgements from American businessmen in high places, who indicated that with the indications of Lewis they achieved amazing results.

I consider it a great loss that the author, former Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order A.M.O.R.C., can no longer be consulted about his intention with certain parts of the book. And that would be very much required, for a number of reasons. In many places the book contains summaries related to periods in which one had better - or better not - perform certain actions. The English language knows a completely different, more sober way of punctuating than the Dutch language, and especially sparingly deals with commas. Because of this and through Harvey Lewis' predilection for fairly long-winded phrasings with an excessive use of synonyms and repetitions, one sometimes cannot with those summaries distinguish which groups of words belong to each other. The used synonyms do not always demonstrate if they want to indicate one and the same notion a second time, or that between those synonyms there

is a subtle difference that really is important to be distinguished. Through all this in some cases no longer a conclusion can be drawn concerning a line of conduct to be followed. In the scope of this article unfortunately there is no room to elaborate on this further. Another phenomenon in the book is, that enigmatic and contrary recommendations are given. This is to say, possibly there is no contradiction, but we can no longer ask the author which differences in nuance we should observe.

As you may know, Lewis has dealt with many types of cycles. The shortest are formed by the daily cycle, divided into seven phases. Moreover he mentions the year cycle, that as well consists of 7 phases, so this means approximately 7 times 52 days. This cycle has a health and business aspect, which is also further explained in the book. Finally there is the life cycle, divided into periods of 7 years. The moon cycles run right through them.

In the mainline Mastery gives clues related to the following main areas. Just to be clear: in places here below summaries are given. In the book they are completely separate areas).

The maintenance and promotion of health. Medicinal, surgical and alternative treatment. Handling people in higher places (judges, civil servants) and those in lower places (staff). The association of men with women, and of women with men. Making new acquaintances. Avoiding persons with ill intentions. Handling animals. The fine arts. Science. Physical, mental and spiritual work. Handling dangerous materials. Dealing with, and the buying and selling of moveable property and real estate. Asking and granting graces. Borrowing and lending money. The making, implementing and promoting of plans. Concluding long drawn-out matters. The implementation of something new with a short or long duration. The making of long or short trips over land or sea.

Within this a lot of combinations are conceivable. For instance the need to avoid persons with angry intentions in one or other period (possibly) implies, that in the same period one should not put oneself in dangerous places, and one even should avoid an offer from someone who wants to sell moveable property or real estate. Even when these phenomena in Mastery are not mentioned together in a certain daily phase.

In an even broader mainline the following classification is possible.

The constitution of the physical, mental and spiritual body. The influence of our actions to the outside and the inside. The influence that external factors have on us. It is striking that a duality is visible, relating to 'going out from the person', and 'entering the person'; short term and long term; in outline and performing; accepting and avoiding; country and water; man and animal; physical and nonphysical.

In this article I shall limit myself to a number of aspects that have to do with the daily cycles. Those appeal very strongly to our imagination, particularly because we can attune our actions in important matters to them almost from hour to hour, as far as necessary. The daily cycles have a diversity that makes them hard to fathom. Suppose that in the fourth daily phase of the Monday (according to the book this is phase F, current - in the winter time - from 10.17 o'clock till 13.42 o'clock), the emphasis would lie on being conservative, to mention something. Then we might expect a number of suggestions which might look as follows. It is

an unfavourable time to start travelling. Operations are advised against. Buy no real estate. Do not borrow money, et cetera. Another period, in which expansion would be at central, might then imply: Start lawsuits now, makes new acquaintances, start erecting a building, et cetera. When the phases would elapse this way, we could descry a thread in it, for example varying from a conservative phase, up to a neutral, inert phase, up to a contemplative and meditative phase, an expansionary phase, or a phase of concentration. Reality is different. In the daily phases such as Mastery treat them such an underlying flow is not visible in the indications which apply to that phase.

For instance the book indicates that dealing with civil servants in the period E is unfavourable. This seems to be detached from what exactly takes place in that association. Whereas of course it makes all the difference whether you have a legal contact with the civil servant, or have dinner with him, or even are married to one. And there is more. Because with regard to the moments of which Mastery says that they are favourable for commencing plans at the business level, it states at the same time that dealing with civil servants is unfavourable. But then a stalemate seems to arise when a businessman has to sit around the table with the government for consultation, whereas he will then have to deal with civil servants at the same and in that sense unfavourable moment. Which mysterious cause is at work which makes that dealing with a civil servant is different from dealing with an employee with a civil status? And what if the person is a civil servant himself? Would it be better for him to avoid contact with his colleagues in this unfavourable time? Furthermore advice is given about the favourable times for dealing with judges. But judges are civil servants, and those exactly are to be avoided in this same E period. Also, concluding contracts is unfavourable in period E, but not the transfer of real estate. Where is the gravamen? In there a nonlegal, subtle difference between 'contract' and 'transfer'?

Mastery can be analysed in many ways. We can examine in which period a certain action is favourable, and in which period it is not. But we can also examine why such a favourable or unfavourable action coincides with something totally different in the same period. For example, why is it within period E both favourable to move into a new house, and unfavourable to contact civil servants in any way? To put it differently, how is it that a whole complex of totally diverging situations is favourable within a certain period, or unfavourable? In the G period two elements seem to lie very closely together. In that period it is not advisable to be in dangerous places, or to handle fire-arms or explosives. It is the same period in which illnesses can cause a high temperature, and body and mind must be kept quiet. I can imagine that during certain periods of the day, like in the G period, an unfavourable modification arises in the physical system, and that this is accompanied by concentration loss or distraction. And that, in combination with activities with dangerous goods, would bring with it an extra risk. Then the advice of Mastery about period G would become explicable. But it is a big enigma why at the same time it would be a bad period to do charitable works or, even stronger, to develop activities related to charity. And what about short or long travelling, on land or across the sea. According to Mastery all combinations thereof are favourable at certain moments, and unfavourable at other ones. The trick seems to be, to find out which three points of the triangle are at stake and in which way their apparent nonrelation yet shows a connection.

I have the impression that with Mastery it is about the hidden power relations, or the

hierarchical balance between two principles. There must be a triangle if the venture, the plan, the intention, the treatment, the contract will entirely be in harmony with respect to two points that each time are opposite.

I can warmly recommend you to take up the book and experiment with it. It has a 'safety-lock'. Experiments with Mastery do not have to be detrimental, because the suggestions especially regarding what not to do at a given day and time are very clear in the broader perspective - despite some contradictions. So in this you can always choose the safe way. And even without Mastery you would have made decisions at each moment of the day which are flatly contrary to the recommendations. The book may cause harmony where it was not present before.

121. Obstacles

There may be obstacles in life which seem insurmountable. But then suddenly a scientific or other invention causes them to be mastered. Sometimes this occurs during our life. In other cases a solution will only come in the future. A child whose parents died when it was young, cannot get them back in this incarnation. The man or woman who is born without a limb or an eye, cannot (yet) be helped. These are factors which cannot be remedied by one's mystic effort. On the other hand perhaps there is no large distinction between types of situations (which are linked to our body or our mind, or to events in our environment) when we realise that they are only a restriction when our consciousness notices them as such. We can overcome some obstacles by adopting a different attitude towards them. Some things we can change, other we can not. I think that this view is still in harmony with the mystic view that things can be changed by directing forces. We perceive part of the governing laws of nature. Sometimes we can adjust thanks to our knowledge, but frequently we are not able to do that. When the natural laws work this may interfere with our plans and expectations. Our possibilities of changing our lives are often limited, but these restrictions lie always within the limits which nature puts us, and are therefore in relative harmonie with it.

122. Lady Justice

In mysticism there is a common notion that describes the coherence of human acting. Every action is a cause leading to a result, and this result becomes a new cause, giving rise to a new result. For this the term 'karma' is used. To describe what karma is one can take one's refuge to a definition, a circumscription or an comparison. Recently I found an image that can very well be a symbol for karma, partly at least. This image is Lady Justice. It does have a flaw, namely that it is a person. It forms a personification of a notion, and with that the image exudes an atmosphere in which I had rather not discuss it regarding karma, namely karma as an assessor. For karma, as a mystical principle, is - as we have been taught within mysticism - rather a process, a phenomenon, and not a person or an allocator of punishment or reward. On the other hand Lady Justice through an exceptional attribute at the same time indicates that she may very well be a model for karma, and this attribute is her blindfold.

If we would be totally consistent and would consider karma dissociate from a personal assessor and call it unpersonified, then shape and sword ought to disappear from the person van Justice, whereas the balance and the blindfold should be allowed to stay. It is logical that in symbolism the shape should be disregarded, for a human body pre-eminently represents the personifying that we so very much would like to abandon. With the sword it is a bit different. It has two sides, the one of which we can uphold but not the other one. If we consider the sword as a weapon in someone's hand it is an attribute of retaliation, by a person, that is. Within mysticism karma is supposed to be a principle of cause and effect and not a matter of guilt, punishment or reward. So we put the sword aside as far as it has a connection with punishment. However we can maintain it as far as it relates to an interference, namely of a law of nature that influences our lives.

The balance is very symbolic when we relate it to karma. Cause and effect in their twofoldness by definition form a balance. Not because always the balance between the cause and the effect stemming from it would be visible, but because the one always leads to the other. In the one dish lies a cause, in the other one lies a result. The blindfold as well is a beautiful symbol to symbolize karma, for we assume the natural law which karma is, or through which karma is governed, to be always working, regardless of whom it concerns.

There is a consequence that we must face when determining that karma is not personified. Within mysticism it is theorized that in Nature a certain intelligence is active, that departing from a judging consciousness makes a decision that is much more justified than we can imagine. This assumption is not by definition correct, but within the theory mentioned the consciousness of the cosmic is much more illustrious and all-embracing than that of a human being. When karma is a reaction stemming from the higher Nature and at the same time in any circumstance may not be criticizing, and therefore is working blindly, it gets very close to a human utterance. For we know a human capacity that reacts automatically in the same manner, purely on impulse, not judging 'blindly', and we call it 'instinct'. We generally attribute great value to instinct, but at the same time many people do not rate it among the most elevated human abilities. They see it as an elementary, almost uncivilized something that has to keep them alive. That the instinct often is not put high on the ladder of capacities is due to the fact that - regardless how far developed we may be as human beings - we seem not to be able to get a grip on it, and this we consider a defeat. But instinct certainly is of a

lofty nature - and perhaps even because of that, for it reveals important autonomously working cosmic principles.

What does the image of Lady Justice teach us? That it is very human to try to grasp the elusive, if need be by ascribing to it a human shape.

123. A robe of light

Slowly the snowflakes dropped down, until they had left heaven through the boundaries of what was decent, and softly came to rest on the half frozen flowers which lay along the pavement at the church. Other flakes, elsewhere and in loftier spheres, and not inclined to lower themselves to the level of some among them, lay comfortably down in the edge of the drainage that enclosed the church at some twenty meters off the ground. There they rubbed themselves cosily against each other, here and there moving up a bit, falling in each other's arms crackling and sacrificing themselves, until an even cover soft as cream had formed withdrawing the grey lead from view. Without messing things up more and more flakes swarmed from on high, prepared not to plague each other by glancing off particles of each other on their way down, and always busy in a gracious manner to twist vertical corkscrews and pirouettes, in their unavoidable, immense pace from the tenuous and angelic realm in which they found their vulnerable origin, towards the depths where the divine had manifested itself in unsuspected shapes.

The windows of the church were surreptitiously lighted. In the interior of the building, where torches and flares were arranged in iron palings as flowers in a bouquet, mainly old women shuffled round, the one at the altar, the other with partly opened mouth before the stations of the Cross, their heads partly raised and slanting, waiting for a moment of blissful inflow of light. They wanted to be ahead of the masses, which soon would march in the building, at which moment they would modestly withdraw. Some old women with fingers bended with rheumatism caressed sarcophagi, on which were resected the figures of saints with mitres on, the crosier clasped in their hands. Where the women moved and further on bent over the holder with candles to again add a flame to the row of torchlights, the omnipresent gentle light flickering their glimmer across the walls, where they rocked in the steady air current evoked by this ritual, as a row of seraphs in adoring delight.

Of this holy gathered company - nonetheless rather being the conglomeration of single elements of creation in stead of the co-operating choirs that adore the divine in inseparable solidarity - the picture lasts of an enthusiastic kernel, glowing through the cold church walls without scorching them. And also in their separate wishful urge to please the supernatural, all those people and little people - because cheerful children ran between them - formed proof that the light spreads as easily in the undivided diamond as in each separate facet of a cut stone.

The flakes which outside imperturbably continued with their pace to the earthly realm, also fell along the church windows. The shining little flames from the candles, plurally reinforced within the archways, threw small beams of their inexhaustible enthusiasm on each separate flake that set forth along the window. In their downward movement they slowly spun along their axes, producing a sea of mini lighthouses which with playful movements radiated the entered rays to the left and to the right. In an ancient past, when the divine thinking capacity formed itself an image of how a world of people should be unveiled, the vision of a winter landscape must have exercised an inescapable attraction on this thinking capacity. It will remain unexplained what the creator of the landscape urged to interiorize it in his being in such a manner that he deemed it to have originated outside himself. It got an extra dimension, which would have been withheld from it, had it merely formed itself in the mind of the

Highest as a concept of its own. But then where does the origin of all this lie? This is a question that an earthly mortal better not ask himself, under penalty of suddenly being deprived of a splendid scene that, as we shall now realize through our intellectual exercise, already was withdrawing from our own thinking capacity. Let us therefore return to what really captivated us.

In front of the church doors a little girl sat on the doorstep. She wore a sweet little cloak, and because of the cold she had wrapped her arms around her knees. The snow fell for her, or perhaps we must recognize that she fell for the snow. The flakes covered this little girl as well as the old and young people who carefully, inching along, left their erasable impressions in the snow and walked up the stairs. Nevertheless the flakes pushed each other aside just to touch her for a second and with a gentle gleam let her know that they wanted to give her warmth, if not by their individual temperature, then by the blanket which in mutual fraternity they wove and spread around her. The child had not been abandoned. She was not the poor beggarwoman whom we so often have encountered in fairy tales. She had just hurried towards the church against the wish of her parents. Having arrived there at the entrance she had cast her eye up. Seized by the façade of the church building raising itself in its full omnipotence, she was suddenly overcome by restraint to go further, through natural respect for everything raising itself above man. Hesitatingly and letting her gaze wandering over the windows, the pinnacles, the gargoyles, little devils and statues of saints pushing forward from the facade, she had made a step backward and had remained there. After that she had crawled into a corner of the entrance, on the staircase where her parents a bit later found her back in a numb state.

More and more people started to head for the church. The snow began to lose its appearance of lost, straying sheep and now became so dense that it seemed as if it wanted to link up in order to create a pelt of sheep of a gigantic scope. The sky had now become invisible, a grey-dark mass, as it must have looked when the Christ child had been born on this earth, and all the angels in the sky had pushed each other aside to witness this event from their unfathomable altitude, and with that preventing the divine light - that shone behind them - from finding a way out. Boots were stamped off at the entrance, hands were intertwined rubbing, cloaks were tapped on and with waft gestures undone from the snow as best as one could. A light vapour of incense squeezed out through the entrance, as the calling from unseen spheres, where one was already allowed to quench with the full glory of holiness. Shuffling and slowly people concealed in collars highly put up by and by approached the heavenly bliss, for as one turned one's back to the coldness and chilliness of the earthly life more and more and went up the stairs, the light from the church radiated into everybody's soul, where it found the reception prepared for all things connected to the deepest inner self.

Meanwhile in the most distant part of the church, behind the scenes, in the sacristy that is, an activity was going on that resembled the one on the other side. For the umpteenth time the priests rehearsed the liturgical regulations with the acolytes. Garments were picked up from the cupboards where in quiet devotion they had been left to themselves - since the previous mass - and hung around the shoulders of those who later on with the churchgoers had to create the passing impression that they were God's incumbents on earth. With this one was less worried about the question whether Christ would find his pleasure in an attire that had gone so far astray from the simplicity which had characterized himself, than about a fold

which - now here, then there - seemed to hang wrong, in a rebelliousness that seemed far from complaisance to the bearer. There is a light form of vanity for which each priest can be excused, because it cannot be subject to an objective judgement. It may have an earthly, temporary side, but just as well be the reflection of the wish to equal the divine, no, at the very most to simply and modestly pursue it and to reflect and approach it in all its earthly beauty. An eternal song of praise on beauty, expressed in acting full of devotion, full of undivided, concentrated attention, propelled by an internal desire, not by the wish to be recognized for one's omnipotence.

The chalice (translation of De kelk)

In coolest dark a chalice stands relaxing
Enclosed by scent of grapes, maybe pervaded
Reviving from its consecrated mission
By golden tabernacle portals shaded

The drops of ages being strung together
Unite into a trail of tribulation
By pouring out a few of them each morning
The gift is made for those who seek salvation

At dawn the pearly gates are slowly opened
The cup is then held up, is softly shaking
Behold the pious hands, the trembling fingers
The outcome of a life of strain and aching

The priest reflects upon the fading pages
Which captured him from childhood, kept him forceful
The Latin pericopes he softly murmurs
Which animated him and were resourceful

The silver pyx with glorious dimensions
Attentively he polished to perfection
Without a child through solemn undertaking
He gave the chalice his paternal lection

His oath for poverty could not prevent him
From being mastered by the handsome treasure
But the intemperance in his ascesis
Escapes the sentence of a human measure

Meanwhile chalices had been taken out of their tabernacles. Uncomfortably the light of the candles burning everywhere, played in the curvatures of the golden receptacles of Christ' blood. The stained glass windows offered a dark sight. Only little was visible of what was coming about outside: that a blank sheet was laid over the earth, built from small dots, in a

monumental attempt to equal the white that comes forward in the perfect soul, be it because of its congenital virginity, or by its loving capacity to cover and transform the dark side in itself.

At the outside of the building the wealth of colours of the windows was better visible, because the candle gleam illuminated them from behind, which seemed to cause a flickering movement behind the angels and saints, the latter of which dragged the chalices, monstrances, heavy books and other symbols and mental images belonging to the range of ideas of the Holy Roman Catholic church. The figures seemed to dance in a light manner, or diffidently attempt to do so, or consciously limit themselves in the expression of their joy, exhorted by what inwardly moved them on this holy hour, and slightly ashamed, slowed down by a still present awareness of sin that the church had imparted on every one of its followers from the earliest days on. Seized by a single squall the snow flakes started to partly attach themselves to the windows. More and more white dots covered the magnificent display of colour of the large rosettes in the walls, as a result of which seen from a distance it seemed as if the ravages of time had seized the mosaics, and as if here and there the lead casing lacked a colourful bit of glass. Many of those who went to the entrance, looked up for a second, to see where the flakes came from and to absorb the outlines of the house of prayer, disappearing in white. The origin of the flakes lay in the dark-grey heavenly robe. But that no one could now see which hand scattered them down did bother nobody. Having already turned to things on high was the sign through which people felt well. The christening by small impulses from heaven was enough to have the idea that at least for the duration of mass one was guarded against new sins and liberated from the old ones.

High on the arcades the images of the saints stood motionless. Those who were now exposed to the elements had in their life of time under simple circumstances, at candlelight, tried to understand and write down their divine promptings. Who of them could have thought that after centuries they would still exert a large influence on the minds of monks and citizens, noblemen and farmers, and that they would be carved in stone and exhibited to the people from day to day. Exposed to weather and wind and snow and hail it was whispered in their ear each moment of their existence that they had become the eternal symbol of their pursuit to sanctify their existence naked and in full submissiveness to the divine. The white carpet had also covered them. Where a crosier stung upward from the whiteness; the flakes frolicking around a book of stone; a puff of wind played around the lion at the feet of one of them, eternity began. At this interface between the earthly things and the characters of stone an unfathomable drama unfolded, namely that with which man with all his shortcomings obviously is able to open his material gown for the influx of the higher light. Having originated from human nature these enlightened minds already in their earthly robe managed to rise up to a plane that for them, but in fact for all was inaccessible, and where only those are allowed entrance who already have taken off their earthly shape. What miracle enabled their being so honoured and yet feared on the basis of their almighty treaty with the unseen, and their extremely intelligent understanding that they - by humiliating themselves - could be lifted up to the highest, to the unseen?

The sexton closed the doors, whereupon the holy ritual commenced. After some time the singing of the choir and the consonances of the music - of which we, who are already enclosed, can perceive the atmosphere, the fragrances and the radiation - pressed outside through the doors.

124. The near death experience

People on the verge of dying sometimes mention the so-called near death experiences. Let us consider the implications of the latter. A characteristic of such experiences is by force of circumstance that they have been imparted to us by people who eventually have not died. On account of that, logic demands to leave open the possibility that their experience indeed was no more or can be no more than what the name indicates: a near death experience. But near is not yet half, as the saying goes. We hardly dwell on this, but there must be a difference between a near death experience and a death experience. What else does logic demand? First of all the observation that, now that the near death experience has been handed over to us by people who eventually went on living, it remains to be decided whether this experience is identical to the experiences that a deceased person goes through. For it is not certain that a deceased person sees the near death experience transform into a permanent and similar death experience. But moreover we must note that the near death experience at the most indicates a situation in which one has not died and obviously is still alive, be it in a remarkable state of mind.

I shall not go so far as to introduce in this connection a term like a 'transitional realm', because with a little good will we can define consciousness in such a manner that each moment of the day we go through all kinds of transitional realms: sleeping, waking, dreaming, drowsing, being anaesthetised, interested, indifferent, sad, glad, et cetera. There is no purely static objective consciousness, and a 'little' life does not exist: you either live or you are dead. And with that at this moment we have to manage with the definition of it as it is customary in medical science, namely that there is talk of an irreversible situation with which a formerly living being no longer grows, has no more metabolism and where no active life functions take place anymore.

So it can be put that as long as someone in his mind perceives something of a near death experience he simply has not died and just is living. Indeed we could define the near death experience differently, namely as a death experience! But from that unrelentingly the conclusion must follow that some people have returned from death. In itself this idea is not unacceptable, but presumably at this moment is only supported by a few (mystical) schools in this form. Reincarnation has no relation with this, because reincarnation concerns returning in a new body.

From reports it becomes clear that people can perceive that others are near their body when it is in a state of near death. Let us consider what it would mean when the person in question really dies and could still see the surviving relatives mourning. He could cope with such an observation in three ways, which all have enormous consequences for our world view and for our perception of a hereafter. First he might be in such a peaceful state that he only registers, without feeling something. Secondly it might be that he registers and feels a deep compassion with his surviving relatives, still from a situation of profound peace. Thirdly that he registers everything and is deeply torn and desperate by the sorrow of the surviving relatives and by his own sorrow. In the latter situation it is logical that he tries everything to make contact with the surviving relatives.

During our earthly life we frequently wonder how it would be to sojourn in such a condition,

this is, in the realm or the situation between two incarnations. Thereby it is frequently assumed that someone from that immaterial realm can overlook our earthly plane, as from a type of one-way traffic: the deceased would be able to observe us, whereas we would not be able to observe him, at least, not in a simple manner. Moreover in mysticism it is often suggested that when staying on the cosmic plane we select our parents and our future circumstances. Even then we might state that this indicates a one-way traffic: from the cosmic realm one can overlook the earth, but not the other way round.

But what if it is all really different? That we do not at all select and prepare our own circumstances, but that this is simply determined for us on the basis of a natural law, whether we are aware of it or not? To put it differently, that from our present earthly way of living we automatically in due course enter the sphere on the cosmic plane that harmonizes with it. And the other way round, that from our activities and way of 'living' on the cosmic plane, we are inevitably drawn towards an earthly life that harmonizes with that? In that case there need not be a one-way traffic, not even a two-way traffic for that matter, but there is a no-way traffic. With that I mean, that when we are born we are from that moment on no longer conscious of our exact situation on the cosmic plane, but also, that when we have died and enter the cosmic plane, we from that moment on have absolutely no recollection any longer of our earthly existence. We may then be able perhaps to remember something in vague images, just like we now have in a reverse way when thinking of a cosmic dominion.

For comparison we might think of the dream world that we enter each night. There our awareness finds itself in a completely different, sometimes impossible environment. In it we experience all kinds of things. In fact we complete karma, because we get into situations of a quite varying nature and as a result are influenced by them emotionally and also rationally. During the dream we cannot even for a second imagine that there might still be something like an earthly life to which we return after waking up. Not even when we have the capacity to instil on our mind that we want to wake up. In the field of our image-forming of the cosmic plane we still have to do a lot of research and fact-finding.

125. A sanctum is a state of mind

If all is well the rules of a mystical school will not interfere with our personal life. Rules have to do with administrative and financial aspects of membership and with aspects of decorum and ceremony, when we visit official meetings of the school, like convocations and initiations. This covers about all the rules that a good school will want to impose on its members. A mystical student must be completely free to study in the pace and space that he wants and in his own manner.

Yet a mystical school can make recommendations for the way in which the student accomplishes his study. An important example is the advice to devote oneself to the study at set intervals, and preferably seek a place of confinement for this which is permanent. The advantage of such a place is as it happens, that in the long run except from being a physical place it will also become a mental place. There one enters and almost immediately arrives in an attunement that belongs to that place, because there one has performed the same study over and over in the past, in peace and quiet. It is as if you pull a switch that suddenly excludes you from the outside world.

It is a wonderful thing when a school leaves its members free to develop in the manner that they think is right. There are students who meditate during car-travels or even among the crowds, where sometimes more quiet can be found than at their homes.

For a mystical student his deepest intent determines whether the lessons find a place in his heart. So, if we are able to set up a tangible, physical sanctum for meditation and mystical work, that would be fine, but if we have to improvise it will be good as well. Everything that we can do to create an atmosphere of attunement, of love, care and understanding, will be enough to be in a centre of Light. A material sanctum is a means and not a goal in itself. It helps through its repeated arrangement to quickly get into a state of attunement, but if we should find another, simpler manner for building some kind of sanctum, this will have the same effect if we put the same energy and love in it that otherwise we would have put in the 'real' sanctum. The real Sanctum is a state of mind, and with a bit of effort we can create it to be very effective.

Possibly, when being attuned to our inner self - in an environment especially set up for meditation and mystic study, such as the sanctum - strange and basic emotions are evoked. It is as if we are like a child again, after a long day at school telling our parents what we have gone through. A sanctum is one very special place to feel at home. No borders, and a place of honesty to ourselves, where we are like an open book to the Cosmic.

But in the last resort the mystical development must be such that meditation and isolation are no longer necessary.

126. Mental power

If we would ask ourselves what the most important understanding is that is evoked by mystical tuition, the answer might be: "The understanding that the human mind has enormous power and can apply this power." On the other hand this answer is not obvious. Because from someone who can develop inwardly by mystic education, one would rather expect that he becomes more intuitive, or even clairvoyant. Therefore it is a development that 'happens' to you, instead of it being 'directed'. And then the applying of inner strength seems to come second.

Possibly a starting apprentice thinks of a passive rather than active development, because mysticism is more often identified with a meditative or contemplative state of awareness than with an active, concentrated state. But if one follows this matter for some time, it is notable that concentration and industrious activity are very determining in mystic work. The student is constantly reminded that he must repeat everything he learns. The subject material must be repeated. Repetition is concentration. It may be related to meditating, the singing of mantras, the withdrawing at regular intervals in an invariable spot (sanctum) to study. Even meditation is concentration in a way. Finally the activity to be repeated only has to be started, as if it concerns the beginning notes of a piece of music, whereupon the state of mind that we want to summon unwinds itself almost automatically.

In our mental body something is started when our mind and will-power always work in the same direction. Just as if it generates a certain energy that is collected in an accumulator and there forms a constant source of callable, available power. This power is not only an applicable force but also a resilience, passive by nature. When a spiritually oriented person finds himself in need he may regain balance and harmony surprisingly quickly when he manages to apply his active strength. But also if he is not capable of doing so, it appears that there is an inner resilience present in him which relatively rapidly restores him into the desired state again. In the first case he has given his mental power direction by means of concentration to create a new situation. In the second case a passive, faithful abandon was sufficient. And not only this demonstrates the strength of the human mind.

It is like when a musical student starts learning how to play a musical instrument. He has seen others do it. He is told he can learn it as well. He has good teachers. And yet when doing his first exercises he finds out that he can do little to nothing. He continues, so there is something that keeps him on his road. Yet he is sometimes disheartened because the results seem so far away. So he pushes himself on. On the one hand he believes in himself. On the other hand he doubts himself. He puts his energy in his efforts. Finally he succeeds. But he will always keep wondering how he did it.

It is also like self-assurance. Like when a rock needs to do nothing to demonstrate or defence its position. It is a rock and it needs to do nothing to maintain in that position. Its position is self-evident. Indifference also may be the equivalent of 'letting go' after we have focussed our mind and have concentrated to create our goal. The meditative state therefore, following activity. After we have created a mental image, we can let it go. We know it has been imprinted on a sort of cosmic mould. We can then be indifferent to it, for it is where it is.

If we look around us we realize that nearly everything we see is the result of someone's power of thought. The chair that we sit on has once been a conception in someone's mind. The house on the other side of the street idem ditto. But also the construction of the park, or the paper that lies in front of us, the painting, the concert piece have started in the mind. The greater part of what we see around us is coagulated power of thought. Have you ever given a thought to the makers of it all? Just visualize the designer of the vase on the table with you, or the person who has put the design on your coat on the drawing table. They are all people who have made these things, and they influence everything we do in life.

Somewhere in centuries past, numerous people have made technical inventions, building on all kinds of earlier developments. At the light of a candle they entrusted their ideas to paper. In later centuries others built on their ideas, and eventually it led to the very complex inventions which can now be found in the world. There need not have been an inspired vision at the outset of a lot of conceptions. Much has started with intellectual exertions. If one wants to learn to understand the natural laws analysis will be necessary to find answers. But not only analysis, but also the being open for inspiring ideas leads to knowledge. In the ideal situation it is about a hybrid of inspiration and mental effort

One of the most impressive mental creations of our time I consider to be Celestial Sanctum (also called the Cathedral of the Soul). This is a brainchild of the American Harvey Spencer Lewis, the once Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order A.M.O.R.C. He has created a mental construction work, with which people agree to meet and assist each other in the mind. Such a visualization is in our society one of the peaks of civilization. What will the future be like?

127. Sharing experiences

Does it make sense to talk with others about highly personal mystical experiences, or to share them in some other way? There are a lot of sides to it and it is good to analyse this. When someone starts with something new in his life that is important to him, for example a hobby or an education, or he changes jobs, he often will demonstrate the understandable urge to change ideas with others regarding it. He wants to give it his enthusiasm and energy, expects a certain feedback that supports him in its venture, and also wants to share his expectations and joy with a broad public. Enthusiasm is stirring, it arouses energy, and from the reactions to it somebody who has started something new draws the power to continue on the road taken.

Starting to work on spiritual development is a radical event in someone's life, moreover when it happens from one day to the next. With some people spirituality has already been interwoven with their existence as from their birth, and in the course of their life is only deepened. For others the contact with spirituality comes as a bolt from the blue, for instance after they have experienced something emotional, like a death or a birth. Then spirituality gives a sudden turn to their lives. For them possibly a reason to tell people around them about it, because a pleasure shared is a pleasure multiplied, as the saying goes.

How does this strike others? Somebody who is well able to put himself in someone else's shoes, may imagine that someone is brimming over with enthusiasm about something. He can think and sympathize with the other person and maybe becomes infected by what he hears telling. He who does not possess this quality may find it a bit problematic. We find it easier to project ourselves in subjects discussed that are recognizable for everybody, than when it concerns something obscure or something unfamiliar. Yet enthusiasm can be contagious when it concerns a subject with which we have absolutely no common ground. Suppose that a biologist whom we know, is just working on a publication concerning the third section of the hind leg of some outlandish type of ant that we have never heard of. He may get totally enraptured by it. And just because we cannot comprehend what exactly captivates him, we can see the fun of it and get spellbound by his story ourselves. There may also be people in his audience who find it all boring and not worth the discussion.

The enthusiasm of someone who has just discovered a spiritual path may have a similar effect. Among his audience there may be people who sympathize with him, who recognize elements in his narration and from experience can confirm that it is indeed the way the speaker elaborately indicates. The other party may be represented as well, the one who must have nothing of it. It would be a shame if someone's enthusiasm would turn against him because all his public needs is to be confronted with the umpteenth story about a field with which one is not familiar. It can even undermine one's credibility.

In proportion as the area is less accessible and progress on it cannot be checked by third parties, there is less sense in informing others about it who are not 'initiated' in the matter. In a nonspiritual field the misconceptions that live with the student are most often eliminated by his teachers or fellow students. In the spiritual realm this is different. There one gets to work by oneself under the charge of teachers, in fact unchecked. One has to find a way to mend mistakes, because life is the school within which one is corrected. Possible misconceptions

with the student about what he learns, come up with him sometimes after a long time. And if he misinterprets the impressions which he receives and meanwhile passes on to others, there is little or nothing that stops him in this.

At that stage it can be especially detrimental to share with others mental images that accompany the inner development. Through numerous causes mirages may come into being, and when conclusions are attached to them they may lead to confusion. In later phases the images become more stable, can be better explained by the student who receives them, but whereas then the moment seems to have come to share them with others, one might just as well put that that is exactly the moment to refrain from doing so. There is not much sense in informing others about impressions which can no longer be shared, when they do not find themselves in a similar situation. We can learn from the images of the saints. They are frequently represented with a glance aimed far up or rather introverted, but they seldom look the observer straight in the eye. As if they want to say: what we have seen we just cannot share with you.

Is it, then, increasingly impossible to share anything with others the more we are around in the spiritual field? It is not as bad as that. First and foremost the question is whether our listener shares the vision that there is an inner world. Most people recognize this, because even if they do not denominate it as such they talk daily about invisibly things, emotions and feelings, which indicate the existence of an inner world. For this reason there is still enough that can be shared with others. It takes inner rest and intuition to determine what we can discuss in all kinds of situations, because especially those direct us in our decisions

But not only in a conversation experiences can be transmitted. There are a lot more ways to do that, non-verbal as well. By simply being in silence with somebody who is in need or needs support, we already convey what occupies us and where our heart lies. Knowledge and experience adopt the form of words, intellectual expressions, or of emotions and radiation. There are a lot of instruments to help others. When we try to share experiences it must be an enrichment for the other person, or else we might just as well refrain from it. If we try to help with love, with the 'suppression' of our ego, we will no doubt make the right decision. Doubtlessly, for it will help to enlighten ourselves as well.

The means with which we share experiences, such as an intellectual, philosophical treatment of a subject, or an emotional dialogue, or silence, depends on the moment. There is not more value in the one compared with the other. Each distinction is artificial. The light that we share may consist of transmitting a personal event, if we think that it can help along someone else. But even our intellectual conceptions can play that role. They form an exponent of our personal life, and sometimes are obtained with blood, sweat and tears. Also an intellectual preliminary design which we present to someone can be entirely lived through by us, and with that surpass an intellectual exercise. An experience, intellectual or emotional, can be shared by us with others as long as our ego does not thwart us, and as long as we have a sincere wish to share our light with others.

128. Visualising

Somebody who possesses a normal objective consciousness, this is a consciousness that we could define as a state of mind in which you can communicate with your environment, can perceive himself as placed in an environment. He can do that by looking at his hands or his body in general, but he can also, with his eyes closed, 'see' himself to a certain degree. For example he can stray through a chamber with eyes closed, open and close doors, imagine himself walking through a corridor. With some effort he can even imagine that he stands at the other end of the corridor that he wants to walk through, and see himself walking towards him. In this sense the looking with physical eyes could be equated with one gradation of visualising.

By visualising we generally understand that with closed eyes we imagine a situation that does not yet exist. But notwithstanding it we can visualise something that already exists for a long time, ourselves for example, or the interior of the chamber that we are in. We can, differently said, observe the existing with opened eyes (we call this looking); observe the existing with closed eyes (this we call visualising); or observe the non-existing with closed eyes (which also is called visualising). But we can also visualise with eyes opened, such as when we explain to someone what we have experienced, because then we see it before us again.

Furthermore we can exercise visualising with closed eyes in different manners. We can close our eyes and think of an object that stands before us in the chamber, and in such a way that we might as well have kept our eyes open, seen the almost complete lack of difference with looking at it with closed eyes. It becomes different when the object in the room is outside the range of vision as we would call it when we look straight ahead with open eyes. For example it stands a couple of meters behind us. If we visualise that object, it hardly matters anymore whether we have our eyes open or closed, because in both cases we do not see the object in front of us. So we have to try to visualise it in a different manner. This means that our mind's eye must aim itself on the object from another direction of the wind.

It is very much worth examining what for us is the most natural manner with this. When we see the object in our mind's eye from the same visual direction as in which our physical eyes find themselves, we would - looking along the object - see our own shape from behind. Yet it is more natural to examine an object from the front of that object. In that case when visualising we would in fact have turned around in our mind's eye to thus see the object. It is therefore striking that - although during visualising we apparently would not have to be bound to a place of perception - we nevertheless take a position that belongs to the position which we would choose to see the object with opened eyes.

Visualising may also happen in yet another way. In the example previously described we are still aware of our own observing body and moreover are in a complete state of awareness. To someone next to us we could describe what we do, how we observe and how it differs from physically observing. As soon however as we are permitting the picture of the object to confiscate our attention more and more, then to the same extent our observing of our body diminishes, as in a balance. We might still be able to see the object as it stands in the chamber with us, but it is also very well possible that it - with chamber and all - is projected before us, as on a film screen. We ourselves are then entirely outside the image, and from this situation

no longer observe from a realisation as if we are in the chamber. The chamber and the object in it have then totally detached themselves from us.

There are therefore several forms of looking, observing and visualising. They are all related with reality as it is and presents itself to us, or with a reality that does not exist and that we would like to eventually present itself to us. Our powers of perception may increase through training. Thus a painter can learn to distinguish more colours, and a musician can learn to be open for certain consonance nuances. We can learn to create non-existent situations. In fact they already exist as soon as we have formed ourselves an image of them, but at that moment they only have a low form of 'compactness'. Some visualizations do not come further then this rudimentary form of compactness. He who visualises a square earth, will find that his creation has a certain reality limit. But to the extent that his visualization is less contrary to the laws of nature it will be able to manifest itself better - this is more tangible, also for others - in matter.

We can refine our capacity to visualise to the extent that we project ourselves outside our body and observe ourselves from a distance. And even further, that we absolutely think that we are standing next to our body. Beside the reports of people who have departed in a 'normal' manner', there are also those who claim that patients who were completely anaesthetized observed themselves from the outside and were therefore departing. The conclusion can be, that - since people can depart during being anaesthetized and this obviously having been caused by chemicals - it is not illogical that this can also be achieved through training, provided that the body is able to produce substances that are just as effective as an anaesthetic. There are barriers in everyday life that stand in the way of departing, and through the use of anaesthetics are obviously cancelled (sometimes). The body must as it were be fed with certain 'information' (read: chemicals) to generate uncommon forms of information.

When someone who has been anaesthetized can observe himself, could we then speak of a very strongly carried out visualization, because someone who is not anaesthetized has the ability to see himself from a distance? This can keep up with the observation that not each form of visualising is as detailed, and there may be talk of more or less limited forms of compactness. You may also turn it round: the visualising of yourself from an objective consciousness is in itself already a form of psychic departure, not extraordinarily detailed however.

129. The influence of objects

There is a risk in buying second-hand articles, because they may disturb the vibratory level in the house when they stem from negative people. This is very basic. You may try to do a psychic exercise, consisting of holding an object and trying to receive images regarding its owner, its circumstances, et cetera. These images may be positive or negative, depending on the history of the object. I know of a story about somebody who seemed to have experienced something of the sort very intensely. He tried to take up in his hand a votiv figurine that seemed to have been used for a long time in some tribe as a focus for magical purposes. But then he quickly withdrew his hand from it, as it felt as if he had burned it. Such was the energy contained in the object.

Now, depending on what happened to an object, it may disturb the atmosphere that it is placed in. Disturbance actually has to be perceived, measured by our consciousness, in some visible or invisible form, and consciously or subconsciously. The point is, that when something disturbing is going on, it may be related to such an object or have a wholly different background. There may be coincidental failures in electric machinery, that take place at the same time that we are focussed on the object. So there really is no telling which causes which.

If disturbances become quite annoying you might do the sensible thing by removing the object to see if it improves the situation. This is a rather sensible act, for it might reveal a relation between the object and you that otherwise might not be established. But, to be sure, the experiment should be repeated, by putting the object back after a while to see if a recurrence of phenomena is noticable. You might also try to get the consent of someone else to shelter the object in that person's house for some duration of time, to see what happens.

But, even if the occurances follow the object, the influence of suggestion may be the underlying cause of anything happening. So, although a relationship may eventually be established between the placement of the object and some (mental) happenings, it may be difficult or impossible to give a real causal explanation. Even if more tangible manifestations occur, which are not mental, the relation may be established, rather than explained.

130. Dogmatism within the esoteric school

How can we determine if something is appropriate within the teachings of a mystical school, or should be embedded in it? Which criteria can we lay down? This is a very complex question, and because in the esoteric school we learn from the very first day that we must examine everything and must preserve the good, it is certainly important to look if that which we accept as true really is true.

In his book 'Fenomenologie van de taal' (phenomenology of language; publisher Het Spectrum) professor Remigius Kwant said: "At present we are witnessing an impressive self-correction of the world-views in the light of the scientific findings. The followers of the world-view of course say that these corrections are secondary and do not touch the deepest essence of the religious truth. We need not deny this, yet must note that the corrections are nevertheless impressive, even to the extent that some people anxiously wonder what remains of the former certainties. One often listens to this question in our days. Let us rather say that the world-views are freeing themselves from primitive elements." And Kwant already said this in 1967.

If we examine everything and want to keep the good, does this mean that there can be no dogmas? This is not at all certain, because the school might introduce dogmas and then state that the student may examine them all and keep them if necessary. The student may have an open mind, but what this mind takes as a subject of research could very well be a dogma. So it would be better first to prevent dogmas from slipping into the learning school, and next move over to examining what is already there.

What is a dogma? Van Dale calls it a "clear-cut article of belief that is no longer subject to reasoning." In an eclectic, universal learning school one will examine mystic subjects and preserve the valuable ones. The existing knowledge is extended still. Man, therefore also the mystic, continuously makes new discoveries and develops new insights. For this reason teachings are not static. However, there will have to be a method to determine, each time when something presents itself, whether it is worth while to incorporate it in the teachings, and whether it concerns verifiable matters. In our time, in which there is so much interest in spirituality, this is no easy task. We see a lot of strange, so-called mystic ideas emerging, which immediately and uncritically find followers. There are people who try to sell all kinds of concoctions as spiritual knowledge. And for this reason we must battle our way with the largest possible circumspection through a forest of theories and pseudo-knowledge. Because not everything for sale in this New Age period should unthinkingly be incorporated in the teachings of an esoteric school.

Suppose that someone would claim - as has been done in former days - that the earth is in the centre of the solar system. That statement is dogmatic, even if this person would say to us: "You do not have to accept it as true. Feel free to investigate its validity." Because it is not merely sufficient that something may be investigated, it is just as important that it can be investigated. When someone nourishes a dogma and invites us to freely examine his opinion, we may be given the wrong idea that because of this no dogma is involved. This is because we do not expect that someone wants to let his dogmatic proposition be a subject of discussion. Generally the dogmatist says: "This is a fact and you may not doubt it being a fact." Because dogmas will be dogmas. But it is also certain that a dogma becomes in no way

less dogmatic when the person introducing it invites us to start an examination. For he might be gambling that we cannot conduct such an investigation. As long as we do not have the instruments to do research, nor have done such a research, we are confronted with a dogma, a thesis at best. From the person who presents the proposition we may demand that he proofs his claim.

How important is this, if we look at the tuition that can be followed at the esoteric school? If there is a perspective in the training, the most important question is how it ought to be assessed, therefore by means of which criterions. A universal school will have adopted knowledge which is tested and tried out through all times, with which the valuable things are preserved. At the same time the existing knowledge is always extended. If we want to know which new teachings fit in with an esoteric school, we must first know which types of education can be distinguished. In a slightly artificial manner we can make the following four classifications:

kinds of education

a) First there is the intellectual education. It includes the history of the esoteric school, the mystical Tradition, the meaning of mysticism, the role of the school, taking part in disputes, making definitions of terms such as consciousness, karma, reincarnation, et cetera. It are therefore the reasonable, intellectual types of knowledge, which we rate among intellectual and theoretical education. The history falls apart into in two parts: the traditional knowledge and the historical knowledge. The historical knowledge concerns facts that can be checked by the student and also by the outside world, such as preserved artefacts, seals, documents, buildings where something special has taken place, and the ideals and the contents of the teachings of the school. These are all useful things to read or learn something about. The second pendant of the history, which is next to the historical knowledge, is the traditional knowledge. It indicates how the structure is of the school according to tradition, although these documents can never exactly prove how and in what shape this movement has managed to maintain itself through the ages. For example it is about the question where the teachings come from, how they have been passed on from mouth to mouth, which persons and organizations according to tradition have played a role with this, et cetera.

By the large measure of the philosophy of the esoteric schools we can see, that in the previous centuries much knowledge has been collected. In all times there have been additions and as soon as a new component of knowledge appears in the teachings, it is the starting point from which many students make intensive efforts to find out the truth about it. There will have to be a method to determine, each time that something new in the spiritual area announces itself, if it is worth being incorporated in the teachings. In our time in which there is so much focus on spirituality this is no easy task, especially because such a tremendous abundance of knowledge or what is passed off as such is presented. We see a lot of strange mystic ideas emerging, which uncritically and immediately find followers. There is nothing against new knowledge becoming part of existing mystical teachings at a given moment. Because humanity continuously makes new discoveries and develops new insights. It must be made clear however that not all presented 'knowledge' concerns visible and verifiable facts. Phantasm may arise with someone, having no basis in a natural law. Not all claims or

assertions on the spiritual level can be reviewed by means of attunement to the inner self. For this reason the student must with the largest possible prudence plough his way through a forest of theories.

The intellectual education takes place by means of tuition and through lectures. When somewhere new knowledge is presented it can rather simply be established whether it is of an intellectual nature. As it happens, such knowledge can be captured with the mind and does not require our inner transmutation. Knowledge of terms clearly belongs in mystical teachings. Definitions of all kinds of notions used in mysticism as instruments to enlighten something to each other come to mind. For example there are agreements concerning what the 'psychic self' is, or the 'soul personality', because if we want to be well-trained we should also know something about that. Concerning the contents of words good agreements are necessary. Not only to create clarity concerning what must be understood by a certain term so that it can become a basis for further research, but also to ensure that within the school a univocal explanation exists, which does not lead to confusion of tongues. Furthermore definitions are useful to be able to distinguish terms used within the school from comparable notions such as the outside world knows them. Just think of the terms 'objective' and 'subjective', which in the esoteric school may mean something else than outside its doors. The type of knowledge acquired through formulating definitions, stands apart from knowledge arising from one's own mystical experiences. Definitions are in essence only a touchstone to denominate that which by means of mystic revelation we manage to realize in ourselves, and for trying to summarize experiences in words that are understandable for our fellow pupils.

b) Beside the intellectual education the esoteric school knows a second type of education, namely the emotional one. It is shaped by taking part in rituals and initiations. Also the tone of the teachings, the atmosphere in the buildings, the tolerance in the discussions develop emotion. New knowledge can rather simply be assessed for its emotional aspect, because it appeals to more than the mind. A dimension is added and we are touched by it personally. If this emotional education is added to the previous one, this is the intellectual education, a beginning of inner development, of transmutation comes into being.

c) The third branch is the mystical education. We receive it through exercises in concentration, contemplation and meditation, so that we learn to attune to our inner Self and apply our inner powers. From the outside world many new things will be presented as mystic teachings, and it is of the greatest importance that one assesses whether the new things are indeed as mystical as it is represented to us. Because once they are added to the teachings of the school they will not so easily disappear again. Certainly not as rapidly as an observation in the intellectual area. And for this reason they must be well reviewed in advance.

4) Finally there is the moral education. It instructs us how we can apply the teachings for society. The moral aspect of newly offered knowledge can be determined fairly simply, by looking if selfish aims are served, or if this knowledge can be used for our fellow human being.

Some way or other everything that is embedded in the teachings can be categorized in these kinds of educations, therefore in the intellectual, emotional, mystical or moral education. Not only should the new teachings be connected with that, but also must they have a relation with

the character of the school, therefore with mysticism and philosophy and the developing of the psychic self. Furthermore the additions must be verifiable. The main principle of the study should be: 'Investigate everything and keep that which is good'. That seems a guarantee that the teachings are verifiable. But because the authority of a lot of schools is so great, it might turn out that many members accept doctrines that are difficult to judge upon truthfulness. Therefore, before examining by means of a couple of examples if a new doctrine could be adopted, it is good to examine, also by means of an example, if the présent teachings can always be verified. The conclusion is that this is not always the case.

reincarnation theory

It may be that this cycle from way back was mentioned in a lot of philosophies and for this reason ended up in the teachings of the esoteric schools. There is a school that assumes the existence of a reincarnation cycle of on average 144 years. We should not preclude that the one person who initially presented the idea of the cycle of 144 years is right and has discovered a natural law. On the other hand it might be so that he had a misconception about what seemed to him an 'inner truth'. It may be so that the school is of the opinion that the existence of the cycle of 144 years is an established fact, verifiable through contemplation, concentration or meditation, and through attuning to the inner self. This vision would then have become part of the teachings because in the distant past an individual mystic has found it out. He has transferred this knowledge to others and thus it gradually became part of the mystic doctrines of the school. But can we exclude that this mystic had a misconception and took a phantasm for an 'inner truth'?

Now it is inherent to the doctrines on reincarnation, and therefore also to the doctrine that there is a reincarnation cycle of 144 years, that they cannot be proved in a 'mathematical', 'logical', 'objective' manner, at least, not in our period. If this cycle really exists its discoverer can only impart to his students what has been inwardly revealed to him as a natural law, but he cannot objectively proof it to his students. These students for their part may initially accept as theoretical knowledge the statement of their master that something like a reincarnation cycle exists, and consequently try to find out by means of attuning to their inner self whether this theoretical knowledge can also for them be converted into 'inner' knowledge. It then completely depends on the followers if the claim of the master can be proved. It is conceivable that this proof can never be given. Until this is different, the theory about the cycle of 144 years is close to the dogma and to me it seems that it is not verifiable.

In the beginning we have mentioned four kinds of education that can be classified. Those elements were: the intellectual education, the emotional education, and the mystical and moral education. Our classification so far was rather technical and abstract. Therefore let us try to determine the following unequivocally by means of a number of examples.

verifying and classifying of new knowledge

- 1) With what type of education does the new knowledge from our coming examples fit in?
- 2) Is their subject related to mysticism and to the aims of a universal esoteric school?

3) Is that which is claimed in this new education verifiable?

example 1:

When someone presents knowledge to the esoteric school, about which it might want to form an opinion regarding this knowledge eventually becoming part of the teachings, it must be examined in which of the categories the just mentioned knowledge must be classified. Suppose that somebody has found a manuscript in an old archive, related to the school or to mystic teachings. Those new data could be ranged among the intellectual knowledge, if it regards the coming into existence of the school as an organization, thus being part of the historical side of the Tradition passed on by the school to its members. Such a type of knowledge would be no point of discussion. It can be classified under intellectual knowledge. But it might be part of mystical education, if the found manuscripts had something to do with the inner teachings. Our third question, namely whether there is talk of verifiable knowledge, entirely depends on what is said in the manuscripts found. But when it really turns out that it is not about concoctions or mystifications, it is appropriate to give the new things a place in the current teachings.

It is also possible that someone offers the school a completely different type of knowledge that would really lead to discussion before it could be part of the teachings. Thus one should examine if the presented item corresponds with the aim and the mode of operation of the school. I shall give you an example of such a situation as well.

example 2:

Suppose that someone has made a technical invention to improve the eyesight of partially sighted persons by means of an implant in the eye. We can range this under intellectual knowledge that can be objectively determined. We might even come to the conclusion that the inventor has been inspired by his inner self to achieve his invention. But before this knowledge can be added to the teachings, it must be ascertained whether the mentioned technical invention has a such link with mysticism, or with the philosophy of the esoteric school, that insertion is useful. Because, is the mentioned technical invention in any way related to the mystical tuition as given by the school to its students? This does not seem to be the case with an ophthalmological invention, no matter how important it is. An esoteric school tries to show its students the way to their inner self by means of the kinds of mystical tuition that are related to this. This does completely exclude the technical invention for the improving of being partially sighted. Still a second test should take place, namely to see if the subject has such a circuitious link with mysticism, or with human thinking, or with philosophy, or with the history of human civilization, that adopting in the teachings would be useful for that reason. This does not seem to be the case here, because not every kind of scientific development is so relevant that it must be brought to someone's attention in an esoteric school or should be treated there. For this reason we need no longer examine if it is about verifiable knowledge, because the subject falls outside the scope of the teachings.

example 3:

Some schools postulate that the students may increase their sensitivity for auras by doing certain exercises. They can use this sensitivity to better judge their fellow human beings, and to create an atmosphere in which they can be safe, sheltered and attuned. So this has to do with inner, mystic development. Now suppose that a scientist has devised an apparatus to

make auras visible. It would very well fit in with the teachings to cite this technical invention, or that reference is made to a technical book in which the electromagnetic nature of the aura is treated in a theoretical or practical, demonstrable manner. The analysis of what an aura is, falls under the intellectual education. Moreover the school gives mental exercises to actually perceive the aura. By doing exercises the student will have to find out if that which has been taught regarding auras, for him can become the 'truth', from his own experience. The test whether there is talk of a relation with the work of the school can well be passed. Also the subject is verifiable. It is about a scientific discovery related with mysticism, and not about an unverifiable, theoretical or philosophical position. In short, incorporating in the teachings a reference to a scientifically built aura apparatus can very well be defended.

Of some types of knowledge we have now examined if their adoption in the teachings is justified. First of all there was the example of the historical Tradition, to wit the suddenly emerged manuscript concerning the history of the esoteric school. Our second example was related to scientific knowledge, namely the invention to improve sight. The third example as well concerned a scientific invention, namely of an apparatus to make the aura visible, together with the theoretical foundation of it.

example 4:

Another type of knowledge is conceivable, of which - just as with our three other examples - we should examine whether it is important to incorporate it in the teachings of the school. It regards knowledge of a mystic, spiritual nature. As an example of this may serve the theories concerning angels. Is this a matter that should be incorporated within a mystical school? To this end we must firstly determine if it is necessary that the things which are offered in the school in this field leave room for reflection and contemplation. We need not always demand this, because when it is about a scientific discovery for instance, such a discovery often is steady as a rock. If it concerns matters which must be reviewed mainly spiritually, then it counts whether room is given for the conceptions of the students. For it is not digestable if a conception related to the psychic world is brought as a dogma. Because especially in the field of the psyche the student will have to give everything an extremely careful consideration. Indeed, his consideration and inner perception in that area are the only criteria to determine if something is right or wrong.

Therefore, if a theory concerning angels interprets everything as an entirely established fact without the proclaimers indicating on what they found their vision (which vision moreover should lend itself to being reviewed by us), then we speak about a dogmatic presentation. And dogmatism does not belong in an esoteric school. Must theorizers indicate where they obtain their data from and how they think they can prove their presentation? I think so. And this must go farther then only stating that their classification of angels is based on for example the cabbala. In a book that I am thinking about now, the cabbala is not cited as a historical work in which angels were considered in a certain manner, but to indicate which source there was for the authors to be so certain regarding the nature and the role of those angels. The book in great detail reports of innumerable categories of angelic beings by name, complete with summaries about the way they govern the life of human beings. The text cannot be commented with respect to a theory concerning the angels, because this theory is lacking entirely. Comment on the book furthermore could go farther than subscribing or contradicting the existence of the historical names, quotations and terms from cabbala or astrology, the

theory of numbers, et cetera. What should we do with names, properties and tables full with angels who are presented as truths without any substantiating? How should we check them? There should be a substantiating of for example the number of the angels mentioned, and of how one can exactly know what they are capable of, but those analyses simply cannot be given. It is not, that a detailed analysis of the structures of visible or invisibly personalities is not possible by definition. For if we look at the work of Aristotle or at parts of the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas, we see that it is entirely possible to theorize at great length about the nature of personalities and to analyse them, and nevertheless remain inside a controllable area. Part of the *Summa* for example discusses into depth human characteristics and properties, and such psychological analyses can be the point of departure for further research, for discussion, or be tested against experience, by you and by me. In this sense much from the *Summa* resembles the analyses of human character traits such as Francis Bacon has stated them in his essays.

A book about any which subject must offer an opportunity to test the propositions in a scientific manner. It may not refuse an appraisal. We cannot excuse ourselves with putting that if a student wants to try to find the truth behind something, he must try this by means of inner attunement. How could a student achieve such an attunement that he can verify all the described phenomena of a book into the greatest detail? This is simply asked too much. It would deny that we have two ways of acquiring knowledge. The one is objective, through our intellect and our logic, which can unravel something up to the smallest details. The other one is subjective, through our inner self, which brings us knowledge that is symbolic, intuitive, elementary, inspiring and above all global. For this reason I want to put that if an author claims something, he must provide proof or make his propositions plausible. An author need not provide proof when his observations consist of questions, or when he puts them forward as subjects for debate. Anyway he cannot require of his public that it goes to a spiritual level to verify his propositions, and acquire knowledge that indeed must come from the physical level, with the logical instrumentarium that can only be found there.

The same applies to work concerning the theory of numbers and related areas. The students of the esoteric school must never let their grip on the wheel of life slip. Man often is a puppet of destiny. He lies his fate in the hands of others. An esoteric school tries to bring him into contact with his inner self and that is all he needs. A doctrine that threatens to make him entirely dependent on all kinds of structures of which the existence is not certain and cannot be proved, is unhealthy and contradictory to what the esoteric school is.

An interesting question is, whether a theory concerning the theory of numbers, angels, immaterial beings and spiritual guides should be able at all to find a place within the teachings of the esoteric school. We can answer that in the affirmative, but this is because we have already seen what the criterion is and what it is all about: a theory, and not a dogma presented as an established truth. It must be related to knowledge open to debate, and verifiable. Such an analysis should not contain an unverifiable truth that actually cannot be distinguished from a dogma. It must be about a position that limits itself in giving an overview of all kinds of conceptions that have arisen on the subject in the course of time from several angles and cultures. This might be subject to a consideration dealing with all kinds of philosophies about immaterial beings, because it makes clear that man has had to reflect a lot in order to understand nature. With such a consideration everybody can form an opinion

about what is or is not plausible. This would be appropriate. In many teachings considerations are given to world philosophies and world religions, because they make clear that humanity has gone a long way to come to an understanding of nature, and because these considerations are a means to generate understanding for points of view which are not ours. Indeed the followers of many positive movements have in common with us that they are in search of things that are good, beautiful and true, to speak with Plato. For this reason an essay concerning comparative religious studies fits in very well in the teachings of an esoteric school, because it teaches us how to achieve with dissenters harmony beyond the opposites, and because a lot of apparently differing notions do not at all differ that much at closer examination. A book about the history of human thinking regarding spiritual beings does very well fit in with this. To give it attention, is appropriate for the esoteric school. To be classified under intellectual knowledge.

Moreover I find that the esoteric schools themselves must be very meticulous and careful with using certain terms, such as the term 'Cosmic Master'. As it happens, it is on the borderline of what a student can still review. It is no fictitious danger that he renders the control over his life to what he considers to be a contact with a Cosmic Master, or to a celestial structure with which he tries to come into contact in a compulsive and enslaved manner. I know students who pretend to be in contact with all kinds of Cosmic Masters, or are pretentious concerning their previous incarnations, whereas in their expressions they demonstrate a chaotic frame of mind. Unfortunately I must fear that they would never have come to certain forms of self-delusion had they not read something about these phenomena.

the future

In my opinion one of the large tasks of the esoteric schools in the coming centuries will be, that they accentuate their teachings more clearly to what on the one hand is theory and an unverified product of the Tradition, and on the other hand is verifiable with fairly little effort by the students. The teachings contain much that can quite simply be reviewed by a student, for example instructions for meditation, for attuning to the inner self, or suggestions for bending negative characteristics, or exercises to learn to be open to inspiration, or how they can pay attention to the manifestations that can be seen everywhere of the law of the triangle, how they can apply contemplation, concentration and meditation to get an attuned life, et cetera. But there are also mystical teachings that do not nearly lend themselves for research, such as the ones related to the cycle of 144 years. It cannot be verified and no more can the theory of numbers, or astrology and related areas, but then again those are no part of the teachings. Now that man begins to mentally develop more and more, the schools will have to be prepared for questions regarding proof of their certainty that nature at certain points is made up as they put forward in the teachings. They must realize that the outside world will come with questions to which they must have a verifiable answer. For this reason they must guard against introducing doctrinal elements of which in advance it is certain that they cannot endure the call for proof.

Possibly the schools will go so far as to no longer use concepts like 'Cosmic Masters', and only limit themselves to point out to the students the way to their inner self, so that they do not misguide themselves. Certain high truths, such as the existence of many kinds of hierarchies in nature, perhaps should better be left to the student for discovery, or only be

mentioned very concisely, so that he does not full of expectation or uncritically look forward to a personal contact with a personified divine character. This reservation by the way would still do justice to the initiating character of the school. Because, the students are prepared, and if they continue their quest to their inner self they automatically will discover and recognize truths that no longer can be transmitted by means of words or teachings. And of course this is how it is already.

Recapitulating I would like to point out that new science has been incorporated in the teachings in all times. This science must be related to the objectives of the school. Therefore there must be a relation with mysticism and philosophy. New knowledge must be applicable and verifiable, either through the intellect or by means of inner perception along the way of meditation and contemplation. Any appearance of dogmatism must be avoided. In the esoteric school there no room for gigantic, theoretical edifices regarding for example spiritual guides, angels or other beings of a spiritual level, or regarding the influence of numbers and related theories. Most expressions in these areas are speculative and cannot be proved, neither by means of the intellect, nor by means of attuning. Referring to sources outside man leads the students away from the goal of the esoteric school, which consists of instructing methods with which they can make contact with their inner selves. This is unrelated to my view that the existence of higher, leading intelligences can be true, and even is very plausible, logical and hopeful. Given the increasing interest of people in mysticism, the esoteric schools will have to be prepared for all kinds of questions regarding their propositions and the extent to which they can be proved. May they have the ability to always disseminate their high objectives with love, and may we have the ability to bring Light to humanity through the critical analysis of their range of thought.

131. A spiritual life

If somebody asks you what it is all about in a spiritually oriented life, it is not always that easy to have the right answer prepared. Perhaps the following considerations can be of help to you. Point of departure with spirituality is, that man is a dual being. He has a physical and a spiritual body, both of which need specific food to be able to survive. The physical food initially is given us by our parents, and later we try to obtain it ourselves. Hopefully also the spiritual food is given us by birth. If not, it may be quite a task to find it somewhere. In any case it is available within the esoteric schools. We need spiritual food, just as physical food, because otherwise we would pine away.

Spiritual food, just as normal food, must be dosed well. For this a gradual tuition is the best approach; a tuition in which the student gradually is made conversant with a framework of concepts that is new as a rule. He is trained to gradually bring his inner consciousness to wake up. For this, regularity is necessary, to be found in the regularly studying in a familiar, natural environment or in a so-called sanctum. But also outside this somebody can lead a spiritual life, without being trained for it or being part of an esoteric school, therefore without a system. An inner frame of mind is what counts as well as the wish to have it permeate everything.

Food adds something to an organism; you can purposefully take it to that organism. But you can also be passive and wait until the food comes towards the organism. This is why we see that in this the distinction can be found between the various methods to gain inner knowledge, to obtain inner food. Those methods consist of meditation, contemplation and concentration. The intellectual food is found in books, in conversations with kindred spirits, in lectures about mystical subjects, et cetera. Next to this there is the emotional and moral training. By being open to an influx of thoughts we get inspired and become intuitive, and this also is an important form in which knowledge and insight can be obtained.

Through all this our personality by and by gets into an equilibrium. We get into a state of harmony and manage to disseminate it to our environment. At the same time a harmonious attunement comes into being with Higher things, the Cosmic, or whatever name we want to attach to it. Peace and a total regeneration of our personality comes into being. A certain insight breaks through, which is called enlightenment. This is a description of a gradual process of development, rather than a final state of consciousness.

Mystical alchemy paints this process by means of a vast symbolism, with which the human personality is compared with a hermaphroditic being, or with a furnace in which numerous mysterious processes take place. In those processes, in which substances go through numerous stages of operation a change is brought about that changes the lower elements in the being into elements of a more pure nature. This is sometimes called the complete renaissance and the acquiring of the Inner Gold. This process is difficult to transmit by means of word or writing. It comes to expression within the student in a certain attunement, that he can still share with fellow initiates only, because they empathize with each other, even without words. Everybody always has a personal magnetism of an entirely unique nature and for this reason persons of the same mind always find each other. This is also the case in the spiritual domain. Through this the mystic work becomes stronger, because it is performed in a

large connection of personalities who are attuned to each other, who are as a generator that develops an enormous power.

Working on the development of the inner self brings about knowledge and insight. Hence that the student in its study regularly marks time, to consider what he is busy doing, which path he has walked, and which path he want to walk in the future. In certain situations, when someone follows his education with an esoteric school, this consideration can take place by undergoing initiations and taking or renewing solemn vows. A vow is a declaration of intent by the student. With it he marks his high objectives. For example he solemnly promises that he will apply his insight for the benefit of his fellow human beings. The esoteric brotherhoods through this mode of operation form one of the highest achievements of human civilization.

A distinguished moral, devotion, compassion, tolerance, the nourishing of ideals and the attuning to the inner self, are the objectives of a spiritual life. A lot of esoteric schools work beside each other in great harmony. Their members are aware that there are other organizations which - with other means - strife after the same thing, and are tolerant with respect to them. A good esoteric school lets its students free to arrange their private lives as they deem fit. They do not have to give account of their way of living, their political or religious ideas, their disposition, race or colour of the skin. They find each other 'beyond the opposites', on the top of the pyramid, where all opposites disappear into nothingness.

132. Where does karma begin and where does it stop?

Karma can be described as the whole of causes and effects which become manifest within a soul personality. What does this mean for our attitude towards karma? Light and darkness, acting and non-acting, guilt and fine, punishment and forgiveness, heaven and hell: it are dual principles, which are not neutral but in the light of the occidental and oriental philosophy have a moral context. Dual concepts like positive and negative, male and female and many other ones do not yield a qualitative difference. They only indicate the cosmic principle that a duality can be found back in everything. According to the dialectical principle the poles of these dualities connect with other branches of the same principle, after which the process of connecting gets a new start. Our ethical thinking in many cases gives it a moral component.

Even now that cause and effect are elements which originate from each other on the basis of a natural law, many people find it difficult to see this detached from morality. We feel that polarities not only form a balance, but also show a qualitative difference. During all day we see that our acting has a result and that this often has a moral component. This is most clearly visible in law. In it light and dark are not only the mere shapes of one and the same; we are also supposed to choose for this one polarity of it, i.e. the light.

In our daily lives we see a whole range of causes and effects. It may differ from trivial things to something very radical. Suppose that we change our job, a whole new world opens up to us. We come into contact with other people, have many new experiences, may even come to a better unfoldment of our capabilities. Then we will attribute a special meaning to the cause (the acceptance of new work) and the effect (the just pictured influence of it on our entire well-being). We feel it transcends the conclusion that it is just about polarities that are neutral and without a broader context or influence. And this is when the concept of karma will quickly come to mind.

We think it is no coincidence that it just had to happen to us that at a given moment we have made such a big step that had such radical consequences. The neutral components of cause and effect seem to be an outcome of a higher purpose. To the extent that the causes and effects in our lives have a bigger mental impact on us, shall we learn to see them as an interference from above, as a manifestation of something that befalls us because in the (remote) past we may have worked towards it. This we will also extrapolate to ways of conduct that have a negative influence on us. For instance we have damaged something through a negligent act. It may be the reason to go and look for a cause behind this cause, which in our opinion will lie in the past. And thus guilt and punishment, but also being charitable and reward come into the picture with us.

Although it will be a fact that we want to be completely familiar with the concept of cause and effect as the neutral elements of a balance, we are inclined to ponder about its morality aspect. This is less the case with trivial things than with radical phenomena. You all know it: you are washing the dishes, let a cup slip out of your hands and it breaks. "Ah, how stupid, why did I not pay better attention." But will you also think: where in the remote past have I done something wrong that has led to this failure? Probably not. But if you have completely wrecked your car, it may indeed come to mind. It is hardly possible to attach it from the one we are. And let us be reasonable, when a radical event is such that it determines the rest of

our life in a profound manner, therefore hallmarking our whole present incarnation, how then could we still think of a neutral consequence of cause and effect, especially now that within the mystical teachings we not only learn about cause and effect, but also about incarnation? Then we feel that there must be an almost invisible thread with our deeds in the past, because mysticism also puts that we progress in development and awareness from incarnation to incarnation and complete karma.

But if cause and effect keep determining our incarnations, does not this also mean that it is all or nothing? For everything is situated in relation to our soul personality. Can there be a dichotomy between causes and effects which are the result of whom we have become over time, and causes and effects that are detached from that? And where does this borderline begin? Suppose that you paid for something in a shop. You get home and discover that you have received 1 euro short for change. Is this disadvantageous element in your life karmic, in the sense that it is an outcome of what you have done in the past, so that the balance should get into equilibrium again? This will not come up to you so easily. But what if the amount is larger, and you have lost millions in a business take-over, does it count then? Or does it have nothing to do with the size of the amount and is it only about the impact that it has had on your mind? This seems to be the simplest explanation, also considering the thesis that we are on earth to progress in knowledge and insight. And yet this certainly does not always apply, because something radical - positive or negative - may happen to you even when you are in a coma and completely unaware of those circumstances.

A better insight in the working of the laws of nature helps us to make better choices. This seems to be the key to this matter. By continued trying to lead an attuned life, with which we have an antenna out for everything that tries to lead us into a certain direction, and by letting our intuition speak, we will become more sensitive to the energies that are in us and around us, and be able to give direction according to our wishes.

133. The implications of prayer

Everone of us knows the inner state of mind that - aloud or spoken from the inside - he wants to confide to a higher being what keeps him busy, inspires him, brings joy or grief. This phenomenon, that we want to bring the things that move us before someone who is an understanding, immaterial 'personality' lying outside us, we call praying. Prayer has one of the following intentions:

- reference
- thanksgiving
- obtaining by begging
- asking for peace and attunement
- showing remorse
- propounding a contemplation
- asking sympathy for a conduct

In a conversation with the deity inevitably the question arises what shape the deity has. Is he (or: 'it') a person, a force, a being of superhuman nature? There is already a difference between speaking about 'God' or about 'the deity'. The former seems to be more personified than the latter. When we direct a prayer to the deity we inevitably do this with (in)audible words. We express something and this implicates that these words are received by an audience: someone who can 'hear' our pronounced words or the words that we thought. It implies also that he can digest them inwardly and is able to react to them. In prayer words form our means to express thoughts. Thus what we want to convey to the deity gets 'shape'. In a personified image of God the deity, as the receiver, is the one receiving the question, the thanksgiving, the cry for help, after which he does or does not react to it. It not only appears that the diety is personified by conveying to him a prayer in the form of a wording; he also is addressed as a person, for instance with 'you'. Even when a praying person adheres to a non-personified image of God he will yet fall back on words, because he lacks any other suited means to formulate his prayer and consequently offer it to the deity.

An alternative for a personified image of God is of course a non-personified image of God. This is conception which is very difficult to demarcate and comprehend. In the course of history man for sometimes incomprehensible reasons has named countless immaterial beings, for instance angels, fairies, kobolds, devas, fauns, earth-, air-, fire- and waterbeings and lots of other benign or malign beings. Beside it the ancestors, departed people in general, cosmic masters and saints form part of what we might call the realm of immaterial entities. In the 6th century AD pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite has made a hierarchical subdivision of the realm of the angels. Nota bene, in this discussion we do not include the question how man has acquired the notion that there are immaterial entities. It is a fact that Dionysius in his work *Hierarchia Coelestis* (hierarchy of heaven) has made such a division. Most of us are familiar with a gradual division of nature, because it forms part of the western cultural heritage. It concerns the classification into minerals, plants, animals, human beings. Following this range in particular, western theology moreover knows the realm of the angels and God. Pseudo-Dionysius makes a subdivision into angels, archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominions, thrones, cherubim, seraphim, of which the latter form the inner circle around God.

Church father Ambrosius recommended that one directs prayers to the angels. In theology they are supposed to be closely connected to God. In old liturgies the Trinity repeatedly is invoked, followed by an invocation directed to two archangels. But whether the prayers are directed towards angels, the deity, or cosmic masters, in every case a non-material being is addressed in a way that we would also address somebody who would have a material body, so taking into account his perception through the senses.

Although it is hard enough already to fathom whether (and how) a prayer directed to for instance angels is 'translated' by them, it is just as hard to comprehend how - departing from a hierarchy of angels - a prayer is received at all, and which class of angels take care of them. Just like a mineral cannot comprehend what it is to be a plant, and a plant cannot comprehend what it is to be an animal, and an animal cannot comprehend what a human being is, thus we cannot picture what an immaterial, angelical being would encompass exactly and what this being could comprehend. If within a realm of angels there is a gradual relation, and the difference in elevation is evenly spread like with mineral, plant, animal et cetera, we talk about dazzling and awesome differences in kinds of personalities and their perceptive abilities, let alone their powers. Mind you, these are philosophical concepts that are as old as humanity itself. They probably originate from his intuition and his deep wish to comprehend how forces of nature, apparently coming from nothing, can exercise influence on his life.

Now suppose that we turn to a deity with a request. Then two phrasings are imaginable as to their structure: "I ask the deity to ...", next to: "God, I ask you to ...". But can a prayer also be addressed to 'the cosmic'? We may define the cosmic as the sum of all natural powers, this is, inclusive of all possible material and immaterial personalities with their unique level of vibration. We can learn to master the forces of nature through meditation and investigation. But this does not mean that the personalities (as part of the cosmic) should be controlled as well: I mean the creative forces that can be aimed to realize our aims. But the sum of all these forces cannot be addressed by us as if they were a person. In fact a prayer containing a plea that has to bring about something for us, is at odds with the thesis that we direct the laws of nature through our knowledge of them. It renders a special problematical case when we use a phrasing like: "I ask the cosmic ...". For it is obvious that this phrase cannot be accompanied by the phrase: "The cosmic, I ask you ...". At most we could put: "Cosmos, I ask you" But the notion 'cosmos' is different in a subtle manner from the notion 'the cosmic'. Science understands by 'cosmos' the measurable universe, knowable to us, which does not necessarily include the total of all knowable and unknowable things and all forces of nature and material and immaterial beings. Within mysticism the notion 'the cosmic' is broader. It comprises as it were the 'cosmos', but also indicates all intelligences who may find themselves in 'the existing' - therefore also in an immaterial world. Addressing 'the cosmic' as a person or power from whom one may obtain something by begging, whereas at the same time one defines the cosmic as the total of the forces of nature which one may learn to master, is problematic. We should realize this when uttering an evocation.

The same goes for the cosmic masters. In the doctrines of numerous mystical movements they form personalities who are so highly evolved that they no longer need reincarnation cycles. With this one determines a hierarchy, for time and again a very limited number of Masters is mentioned by name. This means that one departs from the idea that when a human being has evolved to this level, he can lend his ear to everybody in the world population who lays

before him a request. The same goes for saints. Within the theology of many religious movements saints are considered to be humans who in their religious life have realized the utmost, according to the standards of the religion. At many occasions they are invoked for assistance. Within the Roman Catholic Church this is inside the scope of the *Cultus Duliae* (veneration of the saints) since the Council of Nicea (787 AD). Departing from reincarnation as a law the conclusion must be, that most saints have already reincarnated many times since their canonization. Then the energy that will be released in the prayer directed to them must end up with them in their reincarnated state. This state is of necessity limited by the boundaries of their incarnated personality. What they would be able to do in answer to the prayer we do not know.

In prayer the one who formulates the prayer wants to make contact. Next in this contact he wants to give shape to one of the earlier mentioned purposes, for instance expressing thankfulness, pleading for something, et cetera. Anyhow, he wants to contact an intelligence that transcends his own and is immaterial. With this in all probability he will not have considered a hierarchy. It is more about the quality, attributed to the immaterial being. The prayer is directed to God as the almighty, omnipresent and omniscient one; or to Mary, as the Mother of Sorrows; or to a patron, for instance St. Clemens Maria Hofbauer, as the Patron of Hopeless Cases; or St. Nicolas, the keeper of seafarers. One will not contemplate that if one wants to address a higher being, one should take the royal road, first addressing the angels, next the archangels, in a later stage if necessary the principalities, and ultimately the deity. It strikes that prayers are not always uttered with a preconceived idea of what the addressed immaterial personality can do exactly when he has received the prayer. We must realize that when we take it that we can approach an immaterial being with for instance a plea for help, the addressed entity - when he can actually help us - in his turn must mobilize or bring about forces which might be able to realize the request. Now, which forces can this be, and why would we not be able to reach and address those mobilized forces directly, without an intermediary on the immaterial plane? In the religions saints sometimes occupy a special position, namely when they are addressed as an intermediary. "Be our intercessor with ...". But now that we as humans rather indiscriminately directly address a saint the one time, and a cosmic master the other time, again another time the deity, it is not clear why in some cases we ask one of these immaterial personalities to be our intervention with one of the other immaterial personalities or forces, whom in doing so we have passed over.

How can all this be reconciled with a mystical point of view? Even more, should we be able to reconcile everything with mysticism, even when the origin, intention, result and the reason for existence of that to which it is set alongside is not clear? I am of the opinion that departing from mysticism we cannot allow to avoid an in depth analysis of things with which for centuries we are familiar as humanity but which we have not yet reviewed. Now then, what vision can mysticism have on prayer, especially to whom do we actually address a prayer, what effect does it have, and how does it fit the conception about the vibratory nature of all the existing?

We are all familiar with an in every respect plausible, scientific conception of vibrations. All developments in the field of sound and image carriers, röntgen equipment, mri scanners, lasers and electrical devices prove that man has learned on the basis of his theories about vibrations to master many forces. In the scientific world there is a consensus about vibrations

in the sense that one realizes that a different frequency represents a different manifestation. Vibrations may rise as to their number, and at a given moment they are so high that they are no longer visible on the material plane. In prayer somebody attunes to a certain field that appeals to him greatly. With this he sometimes uses a catalyst, like a meditative space, candlelight, incense, the statue of a saint, a portrait or text of someone who inspires him. He then first notices that something changes in himself. By being attuned to an example, a perfect image, if need be an archetype, he feels the effect of the Law of the Triangle. He himself forms the first point. The one to whom he turns or that to which he turns forms the second point. That which comes into being as a vibration after he has attuned to that force or personality, is a result, the third point of the triangle. This he perceives as a sensation of awareness that attracts him. At prayer he feels that he perceives something that at first was not there. It changes him inwardly. He feels elevated. The notion that pushes itself to the foreground is attunement. Reaching the third point of the triangle seems to be a fundamental need of man. He has found prayer to be a means to bring about a change or broadening of awareness. In a broader sense also the being inclined to act ritually is with all people an expression of that wish. It is plausible that when somebody utters a prayer and besides exerts himself to be attuned and to improve himself in a spiritual way, it leads to physiological and eventually irreversible changes in the structure of his material and psychical body.

Maybe you wonder if it is appropriate that use, range and the physical aspects of prayer are put up for discussion within the walls of mystical fraternities. However, especially within those walls they are fitting questions. Prayer is not the exclusive domain of religions. Also within mysticism it is of great importance. Many mystics were known to be freethinkers and they often were in the past. There is good reason that they undertake scientific and mystical labour, as they have also done in the past. They investigate everything and hold on to the good. They always have held the proposed truths up against the light. There has been a time when people thought that lightning was caused by the gods. That was fitting the concept of man and nature as it was developing in those days. Now suppose - in analogy of our present analyzing of what a prayer includes - that in those days you would have said to your fellow human beings: "You call lightning the expression of the deity. Lightning however is the result of a difference of tension between electrical fields, which at a given strength results in a discharge." And suppose that one would have said then: "It is sacrilege to think this way. Is it not a fait accompli that what we see is the result of the hand of the deity?" It would have caused you a lot of trouble to convince somebody that it must be possible to approach a phenomenon even in a rational manner. Perhaps you would argue that your rational analysis of the notion lightning would, with that, not take away the beauty of the existing things. But it should be possible to even let that argument be the subject of discussion. Why would it only on the basis of referring to the conservation of beauty be possible and allowed to bring up for discussion centuries old truths or points of departure? What counts is that we expell ignorance and superstition from our consciousness, in order that Light may shine into our lives; and in order that we may better understand how nature surrounding us and of which we form a part, does work.

At numerous occasions and rituals an invocation is uttered. On the basis of the aforesaid it would be obvious to formulate such an invocation as follows: "We ask the highest intelligences who possess this power, to enlighten our consciousness, in order that with the knowledge thus received we may learn to direct the forces of nature and apply them in a

morally responsible manner."

Ad maiorem Naturae gloriam.

134. Giving in

Alex Gaudino & Jerma have released a beautiful popsong with the title 'Little Love'. Two sentences from the lyrics have struck me in particular, namely: "Some people give in to fear" and "some people give in to hunger." Looked at with a mystical view the contents of these sentences is extremely significant. They contain a manifold of meanings, especially when both sentences are read in combination.

There are people who give in to fear. They let their lives be led by it. Possibly because they cannot resist something that threatens them. There are ways to stop fear. One of those means is meditation. Giving in to fear can also be interpreted thus, that he who gives in to fear, wilfully or unwillingly as it were embraces his enemy and through it disarms him. Another explanation is, that giving up resistance offers one an ultimate protection. Suppose you are in the jungle and are approached by a dangerous tiger. Maybe you make yourself invisible, but perhaps you let the animal approach you. What more can go wrong? He comes nearer and nearer, closer yet, even closer. How much closer can he get? There is a limit to his reach and his influence. Maybe he gives in to his deepest impulse, in accordance with what he is in essence, totally in harmony with himself, and you may get devoured through it. From that moment on the threat is over. Nothing can happen to you anymore.

When you give in to fear, the phrase 'give in' indicates that you have made a choice, therefore that you have a choice at all. In other words, you can create your own reality. If you choose fear, you are fearful. If you choose not to be afraid, you are not afraid. Mastery of life begins with choices. But it would go too far to put that every human being also in the actual sense would be able to make such choices. It typifies our limitation that we cannot achieve everything we would, and that we are sometimes short of willpower from human weakness.

From the lyrics the sentence about hunger is also very meaningful. The notion hunger may refer to a suffering from a lack of food, but also to a craving in another sense. Hunger therefore in the sense of a general primitive impulse. In this respect some people are uninhibited and giving in to hunger. With this, in their deepest being they are still themselves, but in civilized society we restrain ourselves, in order that the mutual coexistence in harmony, have its course. It is an interesting question whether with that we are still ourselves completely, or mutually lead an artificial life, limiting and curtailing our Self.

Now suppose that the notion 'hunger' refers to a lack of food. Then the notion 'giving in to hunger' would suddenly mean that suffering from hunger is a choice. With that this sentence suddenly gets in the light of karma. It would include that difficulties happening to us are consciously or unwillingly wanted by us. Or, that karma can only be effective when the organism in which it reveals itself is suited for it, opens itself up for it, and chooses for it. When the organism would or could resist influences, karma could not be effective. Therefore karmic impulses could only be realized when the organism 'complies' with that. The karma must energetically be 'admitted' by the organism. Following naturally from this it would mean that the soul personality itself wants to learn what it has to learn yet. In its deepest core it is aware of the fact that some experience must be lived through. The person in question therefore is still lord and master of his existence. However, it may be that the karmic pattern is such that with a 'normal' form of will-power it cannot possibly be withheld from having an

effect. The fire must burn out, until it has digested all fuel. Then the organism as a whole comes to rest.

135. Landscape

Maybe you regularly are in the countryside. No doubt you will enjoy the landscape, the animals in the field, everything that you see and smell, of mountains and rivers. Moreover a landscape calls up emotion in us, recognition perhaps. There is something in landscapes that appeals to us in our innermost being, and yet it is difficult to grasp it. Some landscapes we want to escape from because we feel that they are 'wrong'. Sometimes we try to keep hold of the image of a landscape, and then it looks as if it eludes us continuously. We want to swallow it, yet it still is as if we cannot completely be a participant of it. We are in the landscape but go through it, or past it. Just as if it keeps running away from us and we never really come home.

In our lives we go through numberless events and find ourselves constantly in situations. We go through cities, meet people. Seen as a whole our human life in some incarnation forms the sum of what we experience in it. So it seems to be that the things that we go through in an entire life determines who we really are. It is the result of our karma, of our thoughts, aims and deeds. So when we regularly linger in a beautiful landscape we might also come to the conclusion that it constitutes part of our incarnation, and greatly helps to determine it. The landscape will then not be outside us. We are not passing it or going through it, but constitute an indissoluble part of it, and the landscape is part of ourselves. We may realize that the landscape and ourselves totally belong to each other and we may at last become one with it.

136. The Path to nowhere

There is a beautiful musical piece, called 'The longest road to nowhere' of Morgan Page. The text is quite bizarre, but in the refrain it keeps coming back: "You go down the longest road to nowhere." Enough reason for a contemplation. "It leads you nowhere" may mean that a path is not leading to a specific place. But it may also mean that whatever you do, it leads to nothing. So 'nowhere' and 'nothing'. Is it then true that a mystical path leads to nowhere or to nothingness? It depends on what we understand by nothing or nowhere. Nothingness makes one think of Nirvana, therefore a place where time and space have no existence, and only Being rules. According to certain views there can be no Being where time and space are not valid, because Being always implies a 'status', and - through comparison with any which other status, for instance 'non-being' - is related to something. Two related things would never be able to be at the same 'spot' at the same time, not be able to converge. They would have to be separated, and in the view of many philosophers this being separated can only be concrete if seen in relation to 'space', a distance from each other, and - through that - time. But this vision is not widely spread. For the mystic the Nirvana can be seen as the cosmic plane, this is, the level where are no material manifestations.

In short, "You go down the longest road to nowhere" seems to form a beautiful riddle. If a road leads to 'nowhere', can then this road be limited? We would assume that as long as we are en route, this road to nowhere can be more or less long or short. But how can we 'being en route', bring to an end in the 'nowhere'? There must be a connection between the end of the path and the 'nowhere'. Fodder for quantum mechanics?

The mystical path can also be seen as something which does not exist until we step forward. With every turn in life we create the path ourselves. Our own choices create it and therefore it may be very wayward. And because development continues a final goal is never achieved. The path leads to 'nowhere'. Looking at it from this angle the mystical path leads to 'nowhere', but it is substantial.

137. Skill

Do you recognize this? You try to master some skill, for instance playing the piano or playing tennis. At the start you begin very enthusiastically because you have seen examples by your idols. Although you realize that in all probability you will never be able to fully be their match, seeing the skillful implementers of your field of interest works on you like a magnet. You are starting to take lessons, but in the beginning it is as if you have to swim through molasses. You never seem to be able to master this one crawl, this one note. How on earth did those other guys and girls do it? By and by, in cooperation with your fellow-students, something begins to break through in you. Suddenly you get the hang of it. It is as if you will have to miss a thousand times, just to finally be able to be successful this one, first time. Each one of us in his own field - it may be related to work or education - will have gone through this type of experience. And you will also have experienced that any terrain in which you have exerted yourself will somehow have yielded some result or skill.

All this is about what we could call the exoteric skills. But there are also esoteric skills. Is it not so, that you will hardly be able to imagine that when for tens of years you devote yourself fully to mystical labour and development, that this remains without results and skills. The law of education in all fields simply is, that a prolonged, long-lasting concentration and exertion of will-power aimed at one subject will bear fruit after a while. You construct something. It may be connections in your brain or muscles, but also (through that) foundations in your emotional and psychical bodies. An energetic field is created through everything that you devote your attention to. It is going to glow inside you like a filament, as long as it takes to emit a permanent warmth in your being. It goes further than bringing about a change in your body. It slowly through your body glows outward, so that it becomes noticeable, tangible and visible in your aura. You are an alchemical oven, as you may have seen them in the old depictions from the 16th Century. In it you throw all the unskills. Through your exercises the contents of the oven are stirred. It is just as if you slowly go through the mix with an agitator, in order that all elements that have united in it become blended and are about to form a homogeneous mass. A mass not well blended will later, when applied, appear to have flaws. But if you have taken your time to let the process do its work, the power of the blend will only increase. It will become a golden process, in which the hand of the student slowly becomes the hand of the master.

138. Visualizing

Somebody who has a normal awareness, this is, an awareness that we might describe as a state of mind in which one can communicate with one's environment, is able to perceive himself as placed in an environment. He may do this by looking at his hands or his body in general, but he can also, with his eyes closed, 'see' himself in a certain manner. For instance he may dwell through a room with his eyes closed; open en shut doors; imagine how he walks through a corridor. With a little bit of effort he may even imagine with closed eyes that he stands on the other side of a corridor that he is about to cross, and see himself walking towards him. In this sense the looking with physical eyes could be compared with one gradation of visualizing.

Normally by visualizing we understand that we imagine with closed eyes a situation that does not yet exist. But of course we can also imagine something that has been in existence for a long time already, ourselves for instance, or the interior of the room that we find ourselves in. To put it differently, we can perceive the existing with our eyes open (we call that looking); perceive the existing with closed eyes (this we call visualizing); or perceive the non-existing with closed eyes (which is also called visualizing). But we can also visualize with open eyes, as when we explain to somebody what we have encountered, for then we see things happening again in front of us.

Furthermore the visualizing with closed eyes can be done in several fashions. We may close our eyes and think of an object that is in front of us in the room, in such a way, that we might as well have kept our eyes open, such minor difference is there compared with looking at it with eyes closed. It becomes different when the object in the room is outside the scope of our vision as we would call it when with open eyes we look straight ahead. For instance it is situated a few meters behind us. When we visualize this object it hardly matters whether we have our eyes open or closed, for in both cases we do not see an object in front of us. So we have to manage to see it in some other manner. This means that our mind's eye must fix on the object from another direction.

It is very much worth while investigating what for us is the most natural way to do this. When we see the object in our mind's eye from the same visional direction as in which our physical eyes are, we would, looking past the object, see our own shape from behind. Yet it is more natural to observe an object from the front of that object. In this case when visualizing we would in our mind in fact have turned around in order to thus see the object. So it is striking that - although apparently we would have no need to be bound to a place of perception when visualizing - we yet take a position that belongs to the position that with open eyes we would choose to see the object.

Visualizing may happen in yet another manner. In the previously mentioned example we are still aware of our own perceiving body, moreover we are in a situation of complete awareness. We could describe to somebody next to us what we are doing, how we perceive and how it differs from physically perceiving. However as soon as we allow the image of the object taking up our mind more and more, then to the same extent our perception of our body ceases, as in a balance. We might still be able to see the object the way it stands with us in the room, but it is also very possible that - with room and all - it is projected before us as if on a

kind of cinematographic screen. We ourselves will then be totally 'out of the picture', and in this situation we are no longer perceiving as from a realization as if we ourselves are in the room. The room and the object in it will then have completely detached themselves from us.

So there are several forms of looking, perceiving and visualizing. They all have to do with reality as it is and as it presents itself to us, or with a reality such as is not really there, and such as we want it to present itself to us. Through practicing our perceptive faculty may increase. Thus a painter may learn to distinguish more colours, and a musician may learn to be open to certain ranges of sounds. We may also learn to create non-existing situations. In fact they already exist when we have made an image of them, but at that moment this creation has a low form of 'density' yet. Some visualizations will not get any further than this rudimentary form of density. He who visualizes a square earth will see that his creation has a certain limit of reality. But to the extent that his visualization is less in contradiction with the laws of nature, it will better - this is, more tangible, even to others - be able to manifest itself in matter.

We may refine our ability to visualize in such a way that we project ourselves outside our body and witness ourselves from a distance. Even in such a way, that we are of the opinion to stand completely outside our body. Next to reports of people who have left their body in the 'normal' manner, there are also those who indicate that patients who were fully anesthetized witnessed themselves from outside and therefore had left their body. The conclusion may be that - now that people during anesthesia can leave their body, and this apparently is caused by chemicals - it is not onlogical that this may also be achieved by exercising, provided that the body is able to produce materials that have the same effect as a narcotic. In everyday life there are barriers that considerably thwart the leaving of one's body, and under anesthesia they apparently are (sometimes) lifted. The body must be fed as it were with certain 'information' (i.e.: materials) to generate unusual types of information.

When somebody is able to observe himself while being under narcosis, could we then not speak of a visualization carried through very strongly, because even somebody who is not under narcosis has the ability to observe himself from a distance? This may remain aligned with determining that not every form of visualizing is as detailed, and there can also be talk of more or less limited forms of density. One could also turn it round: visualizing oneself from a state of awareness already is a form of leaving the body, but in this case not extremely detailed.

139. When will enlightenment be achieved?

The notion enlightenment depends on our definition of it. A darkened mind may have the illusory idea that it is godlike and elevated above all men, whereas an enlightened mind might only feel insignificant. When are we in total control of everything? And what is everything? These are the questions that come to mind and we seek the answers within the walls of an institution that is very appropriate for it: the esoteric school.

Whether the need for esoteric schools is limited, will depend on the development of our planet. When mankind will ever be enlightened they may be needed no longer. We know of no human organization that has lasted for ever, or has been vested from the earliest days of mankind up to now. Organizations are no static monoliths but are vehicles, images of the mind, of human beings, who shape them according to their need and understanding which alter almost by the decade. When an esoteric school is seen in a broader perspective, we may come to the conclusion that man will always need some type of guidance that helps him to develop his inner senses and leads him to attunement to the cosmic. Mysticism will thus be part of the inner urge of mankind to contact its higher Self. There are many roads that lead to this goal, and one of them are the esoteric schools.

Now, if we ask a student of such a school: "Are you enlightened?", we immediately get a Pavlov-reaction: "No, of course not." Everybody is very reluctant with this notion. Yet this is odd. None of these students will consider enlightenment as something that is a final stage. Maybe some get suddenly enlightened, but because there are so many different people, with so many differing backgrounds and tasks, we may agree that the contents of the notion enlightenment constitutes different things for different people. Also because of this, enlightenment seems to be a point in a continuous, individual process rather than a final stage of something that looks the same to everybody. And just because it seems to concern a continuous process, with which enlightenment moreover cannot be considered only to be a flash, but also a gradually unfoldment of a higher insight, it is odd that we are so determined to avoid calling ourselves - to whatever degree - enlightened. It is also not very consistent, for would it encompass that hundreds of thousands of people join an esoteric school to become enlightened (mind you, one is allowed to utter the goal); consequently do not become enlightened; and nonetheless keep endeavouring this - obviously useless - goal?

Let us not deal with the notion enlightenment so convulsively and be so falsely modest. Time and time again we hear ourselves say to others, that together we work towards a society in which the people are enlightened, in order that they be a blessing for each other and a reflection of heaven. And time and again we hear ourselves say that in any case we ourselves are not enlightened. Just imagine, what arrogance would we be accused of!

Enlightenment is more nor less - from its lowest to its highest gradation - than the broken through insight that one is one with Nature, in harmony with it, in harmony with oneself, with the other and with higher things. There is nothing more to it, nor less to it. It is no unachievable goal, it is - as we assure each other over and over - an instrumental state of a progressed consciousness.

Enlightenment is a process, with which in numerous occasions we make ever better choices.

We are all enlightened, to the extent of our ability, especially now that we are grafted unto activities within a fraternity that has made it its goal to achieve enlightenment. This is not to say that we cannot improve ourselves.

When future people look back over many generations they must be able to say, just as we do when looking back in history: "Those mystics of the 20th and 21th century were already very enlightened. In a time of economic boom, in which everything was about money and commodities, in which murder and gigantic wars were the order of the day, they already had taken over the torch of their predecessors. Even then they already discovered that happiness can only be found in a true attunement to the inner self, and in abiding the voice of the Inner Master. They applied this knowledge everywhere they could. Yes, they were truly enlightened. We call them: the Old Ones."

140. The Role conflict

Regularly I encounter a strange phenomenon that no doubt you will recognize as well. It is something that may occur in all working areas. It has to do with our contacts with other people and the so-called role conflict. A role conflict is described as an inner conflict that can be caused by fulfilling several roles. In life we have different roles, for instance as a brother, employee, friend, official, lover, spouse, community worker, controller, artist, politician. Here you find mentioned ten of them and all may be gathered in just one person.

In all those different roles we have subroles. An artist for instance, will make contact with musea to exhibit in them. He will want to present himself in a certain manner, because he wants to [gedaan wil krijgen] be granted exhibition room. In such a contact with the officials of the museum he will therefore assume a tactical attitude, very convincingly present his work, convince the management that he is an asset to the museum, et cetera. One week later he will find himself at the Tax Collectors Office to advocate some business matter. There he may take a more servile position. Even there he will pull out all the stops to get what he intends. Even there he may speak highly of his artistry, to be liable to a favourable regulation. But it could just as well be that he makes it look as if he can hardly make ends meet, applying for a substantial deduction of costs. Once he has organized the exhibition and is present at the opening, he may want to expand on the image of a mysterious, unwordly, therefore 'genuine' artist. The audience more or less expects this, excentricity, and he obliges them with pleasure.

Having come home he finds an invitation for a birthday party. Having arrived there he is the jovial interlocutor, somebody in whose company everybody feels at home. Maybe he will go chatting up a girl, and by and by plays the role of the caring man, the ideal son-in-law, to whom every woman would succumb (and her parents as well).

Besides his co-job as an artist this person also is a mentor of ineducable youngsters, in a community center. There he must for art and culture try to raise the interest of a number of talented but awkward adolescents. Now he assumes the role of a teacher, with which he tries to give shape to his pedagogical and psychological dexterities.

Up to now all these roles are not contradictory, because the central figure is constantly active within separate non-overlapping circles. Now it may very well be that at a birthday party he encounters the person of the Tax Collectors Office with whom just the other week he has had the interview, or somebody of his artists' group. Now, what role will he assume, c.q. what behavior is he going to display? When we deal with an evenly person, he will have demonstrated to the outside under all circumstances a personality that is in essence steady, consistent. But if this is not the case, it may bother him considerably that when he adopts an attitude as during his conversation at the Tax Collectors Office, the other persons present will think: "How strangely he acts, he is not himself." Or when the tax official suddenly sees the bashful applicant disclose himself as a party animal, he in his turn will be at a loss at what is happening. In these situations, so when the central person has the feeling that towards all those present he cannot freely assume the attitude that he assumes with every one of them separately, there is talk of a role conflict.

A good method to get to know whether you could find yourself in such a role conflict, is imagining that you are in a circle of people with whom separately you always fulfill a certain role. How would you move in this company, how would you talk, what would you say? Would you become at odds with yourself, feel uncomfortable? Would you feel obliged to mutually explain to the persons present why you seem not to be like you at all? If this is the case, you have a role conflict, otherwise you have not.

Now, such an inner conflict for sure may be very unpleasant for the person concerned, but there may also be an ethical component that yields feelings of guilt. Imagine that you as a physician have a long-lasting and interesting technical discussion with your fellow-colleagues about the contents of a patient's file. It is about 'a nice case', and following it you enjoy the intellectual challenge that the conversation brought with it. Five minutes later you are at the bed of the terminally ill patient involved. Then you are the understanding doctor who offers help and support, being the true anchor of the patient. You cannot bear to think that this patient has just heard you talking about his illness as about 'a nice case'. The role conflict is present here, only the scene is laid in yourself, without other parties being able to recognize it as such. When after the meeting your colleagues together with you would stand at the bed of the patient, the difference as to role (you as a technical chap besides you as a caring physician) would be visible, but because you and your colleagues combined are in the same boat, they can very well reconcile your attitude towards the patient with your enthusiastic opinions during the consultation about patients, where you were occupied in a sheer technical way. Actually we do not have a role conflict in this case. For within the party that has been able to be cognizant of your different attitudes your differing 'faces' are acceptable.

The same phenomenon can be found in the legal world. A judge may enjoy a beautifully written criminal sentence. He has dug out all relevant jurisprudence, his reasonings are of a high quality, this is going to make it to the legal journals. But the end of the matter is, that with it he sends somebody to jail for ten years.

So it is not surprising that a role conflict in this sense can also bring with it a feeling of guilt. Now, is it morally justified to enjoy a beautiful patient's file, when the patient at the same time is dying of pain? Is it morally justified to enjoy a legally elaborate sentence, when at the same time it leads to much personal suffering? And must we unite or pull apart these worlds - the technical, intellectual, besides the human and sometimes deeply tragic -, or on the contrary recognize that they already are totally separated worlds? Surely the physician mentioned will not enjoy the suffering of his patient, nor will the criminal judge enjoy the punishment that he imposes on the criminal. In their roles the professionals encounter several aspects of their personality. They get in schools which each for their part give shape to their intellectual, social, sociological and psychological development. Their intellectual, logical, calculating side gets a chance, as well as their caring, loving and understanding side. The 'direct objects' in these schools - the patient, the prosecuted - however cannot always without consequences be confronted with the points of view of the masters, because those, despite all good intentions, are not always able to explain what moves them.

Definition list

Actuality / Reality

When used in the text, the term 'actuality' refers to that which is the ultimate essence of a subject or object. Now that we are equipped with our five physical senses and with a limited ability to perceive things with our inner senses, 'actuality' in its totality escapes us by definition. We will only be able to be conscious of part of it. 'Reality' refers to that which is knowable through the human senses, both the inner and outer ones. It has to do with phenomena that must all lie within the reach of those senses. Even abstract thoughts, which as such escape our perceiving by the senses, should be ranged among 'reality'.

Attuning

Turning one's mind to the Higher Self. Through it harmony comes into being in ourselves, and we achieve harmony with everything around us.

Aura

An electro-magnetic field of energy around the body, influenced by the condition of the body, the mind and the soul personality. Besides there is a psychic energy field. Both with and without an apparatus the aura is demonstrable. It manifests itself as a colourful rim that envelops the body. The aura has a protective function and besides is the means with which living beings communicate with each other in a subtle manner. Every material and immaterial source has its own, characteristic radiance. The aura is the genuine feature and the true measure of both the attunement and the health of body and soul personality. It can but show the true nature of the realm of which it is the reflection. The aura is the catalyst through which the karma comes into manifestation. It also is the purest means through which to judge someone's character.

Avatar

Within mysticism this is the name for a highly evolved entity that plays a key role in the development of the human awareness. This designation is reserved for a human being who seems to fulfil this task as the determined representative of the highest mystical laws in a certain juncture. The term 'world teacher' corresponds with this.

Cosmic Consciousness

The highest consciousness in the cosmos, from which all existing things have come forth. This notion is also used to indicate a sacred state of psychic enlightenment.

Cosmic Mind

An aspect of the cosmic consciousness.

Esoteric school

A school of initiation, where the mystical student is instructed in the laws of nature and the laws of the human personality. Initiations or rituals are intended to symbolically mark several stages of the apprenticeship; prepare the student for new phases of the Work; and confront him with and have him contemplate the achieved results.

The Great White Brotherhood

The Tradition, as the total of all minds and organizations aimed at diffusing the light.

Higher or Inner Self / Inner Master / Soul

The divine spark. The voice of the form of consciousness that speaks from the higher planes to the soul personality and is connected with it. Therefore it is more correct to talk of 'the' higher self than of 'our' higher self. Nevertheless mystics often talk about 'our' higher self.

Incarnation

The period in which the soul personality of a human being is connected with his material body.

Karma

The range of effects of thoughts and deeds, realized or not realized in our mind. When the mind realizes these effects they give a pleasant, neutral or unpleasant impression. The karma is not autonomous, but bound by the human personality. Its manifestations are strictly fair because they follow the laws of nature.

Mysticism

The science that tries to apply through investigation the laws of nature in such a manner that an equilibrium between the inner and outer self comes into being. It is the quest of the inner self for the deeper wisdoms of the higher self, and the attunement to the higher levels of consciousness. The student makes use of mental, intellectual, emotional and psychic training. The instruments to give shape to this tuition are meditation, contemplation and concentration. The result is an understanding, harmonic and peaceful mind that is totally

adapted to the spiritual aspects of life. With that, justice is done to the needs of the dual shape in which man is manifested. Mysticism is not the same as asceticism, which is rejected by many mystics. Mysticism emphasizes the harmonic balance between the inner and outer personality, which both have their unique place and require their own food. When the inner and outer self are in balance, the right attunement to the higher Self is within reach. Asceticism does not fit into this point of view, because it does not let the outer side of life develop to the full.

Metaphysics

That which is related to the phenomena of the immaterial realm. So metaphysics is part of mysticism, which deals with the equilibrium between the material and immaterial aspects of the existence.

Neophyte

A student. A supplicant. The term is often used for somebody who has just started with his study.

Objective / Subjective

In the common meaning objective is seen as: sticking to the facts, unbiased, open. In the text it is meant to indicate: being related to the sensorial plane.

Subjective means: not based on ratio, being related to the personality, biased, depending on a personal view, prejudiced.

However in a mystical context subjective may mean: that which is related to the unbiased, inner perception, being related to the inner life. Objective is in a mystical sense that which is related to the visible world and the outer senses.

Psychic / Mental

That which is related to the distinguishing features of the human mind. There may be a slight difference between them, because mystics often relate the psychic aspect to the somewhat more lofty levels of consciousness.

Reincarnation

The cyclic process with which the soul personality of the human being - at birth - forms a connection with a physical body. With death this connection is ended. After some time the soul personality with its attainments anew enters into a relationship with a physical body.

Spiritual

That which is related to the cosmic sphere and to the contact between it and the human consciousness.

The Universe / The Cosmic / Nature

The sum of all visible and invisible realms, manifestations, natural laws, minds, personalities, forces and intelligences. In a stricter sense this notion is often used to indicate the realm from which the earth is guided in a higher sense. When the mystic talks about attuning to the cosmic realm, he centres his thoughts exclusively upon its positive aspects.

Soul personality / Inner Self

The element of the inner personality that has been build up from the experiences of the material and immaterial world, and in its core is connected with a higher consciousness: the Soul. The soul personality expresses itself when soul and body come together. It is an autonomous entity. It maintains the experiences that it has gathered during the course of several incarnations.